

Ten Famous Plays

BY

JOHN GALSWORTHY

INTRODUCTION BY
ERIC GILLETT



DUCKWORTH

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Contents

INTRODUCTION

THE SILVER BOX

JOY

STRIFE

JUSTICE

THE SKIN GAME

LOYALTIES

WINDOWS

OLD ENGLISH

ESCAPE

THE ROOF

DEDICATIONS

"THE SILVER BOX," "JOY," and "STRIFE"

are dedicated to H. GRANVILLE-BARKER

"JUSTICE" to JOHN MASEFIELD

"THE SKIN GAME" to H. W. MASSINGHAM

"LOYALTIES" and "WINDOWS" to THOMAS BLAIR REYNOLDS

"OLD ENGLISH" to JOHN DRINKWATER

"THE ROOF" to LEON M. LION

INTRODUCTION

JOHN GALSWORTHY'S contribution to the English drama is as important as it is sincere and theatrically effective. This volume contains the five plays embodying the elements that first made his great and worthy reputation as a writer for the stage. They are *The Silver Box*, *Strife*, *Justice*, *The Skin Game*, and *Loyalties*. With them appear *Joy*, *Windows*, *Old English*, *Escape*, and *The Roof*.

In everything that he wrote, whether in prose or verse, Galsworthy manifested his strong artistic sense. In *Some Platitudes Concerning Drama* he stated:

"A drama must be shaped so as to have a spire of meaning. Every grouping of life and character has its inherent moral; and the business of the dramatist is so to pose the group as to bring that moral poignantly to the light of day. . . . The art of writing true dramatic dialogue is an austere art, denying itself all licence, grudging every sentence devoted to the mere machinery of the play, suppressing all jokes and epigrams severed from character, relying for fun and pathos on the fun and tears of life. From start to finish, good dialogue is hand-made, like good lace; clear, of fine texture, furthering with each thread the harmony and strength of a design to which all must be subordinated. . . .

"A good plot is that sure edifice which rises out of the interplay of circumstances on temperament, or of temperament on circumstances, within the enclosing atmosphere of an idea."

There are points in this manifesto to be considered later. It is enough to say here that it gives striking proof of the writer's artistic integrity.

It was in the autumn of 1905, when the famous management of J. E. Vedrenne and Harley Granville-Barker was making theatrical history at the Royal Court Theatre in Sloane Square, London, that Edward Garnett wrote to Galsworthy suggesting that he might write a play for it. For many years Garnett was a power behind the throne in literary circles. Possessing no creative gifts himself, Garnett was an indefatigable inspirer and adviser to authors. His admiration of Galsworthy's fiction was deep, but it was never uncritical. Garnett believed that the novelist's dialogue and his strong sense of construction fitted him to be a dramatist, and although Galsworthy refused his suggestion, he began work almost at once on the play first known as *The Cigarette Box*, afterwards destined to make its author's stage reputation as *The Silver Box*. As early as March 1906 Galsworthy was thanking Garnett for "invaluable criticism". In the light of it he revised the play and sent it off to Granville-Barker. It arrived on a Saturday, was read by him and by Bernard Shaw on the Sunday, and accepted on the Monday.

There are competent judges who still believe that Galsworthy never wrote a better play than *The Silver Box*. Others consider that it runs *Strife* close as the dramatist's masterpiece. There is no doubt that it made a profound impression upon critics and audiences when it had its first production on the 25th of September 1906.

The main theme of the play is the operation of the Law as it affected rich and poor. There are two sharply contrasted groups. The prosperous, consequential Barthwicks, with their good-for-nothing son Jack, typify outward respectability, dominated by the belief that their Pharisee-like façade must not and cannot be damaged. The Jones family, poor, miserable, down-at-heel, have no defences. Sheer poverty drives them into an indefensible position, and in the end Jones is sent to prison with hard labour, while Jack, who had taken a purse from a prostitute, gets off scot free. Galsworthy's management of the opportunities for pity and irony that the central situation

afforded him, was something fresh and remarkable in the theatre at that time. To the critics the play, with its complete lack of sensation and sentimentality, seemed uncontrived, almost casual, so original was the dramatist's treatment. No wonder that E. V. Lucas, in a letter to Galsworthy, called it a "work of extraordinary interest and quiet power. God knows what will happen", he continued. "for it will send away hundreds of persons with the conviction that play-writing is as easy as reading a police report." A revival, over thirty years later, proved that *The Silver Box* remains a good play and a penetrating study of life in its time. Generations to come may regard it as a picture of almost unbelievable conditions in Edwardian England.

In recent years there has been far too much talk of Galsworthy's limitations as a playwright. Every writer is compelled to work within the confines of his own personality. Galsworthy responded swiftly and compassionately to the demands made upon him, as an artist, by any situation or problem that seemed to him to cry out for ventilation. In his second play, *Joy*, which he called "A Play on the Letter I," he turned from social to personal problems. This gentle, summer comedy of love and lovers, of complex human relationships, with its sub-acid undertones, was a sore trouble and disappointment to almost all the critics. It was extraordinary, they felt and most of them wrote, that a writer of unusual gifts had chosen to waste his energies on a little, trivial teacup and deck-chair frivol. What was much worse, Galsworthy had missed his opportunities—and, in fact, deliberately thrown them away. It is easy to see now how completely the critics had missed the point. They failed to see that Galsworthy had carried his talent for naturalistic drama into another sphere; but how they managed also to miss the acute characterisation informing the two young people, how they managed to blind themselves to the *rightness* of the the author's treatment of the relationship between Joy and her mother, is baffling to-day. The dramatic critic of *The Times*, A. B. Walkley, was a welcome exception to this general critical dispraise. He understood the author's

naturalistic intention. "All these people", he wrote, "loaf or skip (according to their ages) about the lawn, and talk about nothing in particular, until you wonder what is to be the subject of the play. And suddenly, while you are looking another way, that subject emerges, and begins to have, for you, an ever-increasing interest, while most of the people on the stage never so much as suspect its existence or, if they do, try to make things comfortable by hushing it up." That might have been written of a play by Tchekov, and as in the Russian dramatist's plays, there is in *Joy* a wistful, and sometimes a lyrical note that Galsworthy never attempted again.

There was general relief among the pundits when he returned to his sociological interests, eighteen months later, with *Strife*. It had been written six months before *Joy* was produced, and Joseph Conrad, reading it in manuscript, wrote to Galsworthy ". . . the murmurs against *Joy* shall be drowned in such a shout around *Strife* as this country has not heard for a hundred years or more." If a little allowance is made for the novelist's Polish exuberance, it may be said that he has been proved right.

Twenty years afterwards Galsworthy pointed out that *Strife* was not written as a play on the subject of Capital and Labour. It is a play on extremism or fanaticism. In a tinplate works in Wales a strike is on. The men and their families are suffering privation in a cruel winter. The chairman of the works and the strike-leader are both of them able, wrong-headed and obstinate. In the end both sides throw over their leaders, and the terms suggested at the outset are adopted after great suffering and sorrow. The author hoped that audiences would not go to *Strife* to see Capital or Labour "get a hoist". "They should go", he wrote, "to see human nature in the thick of a fight, the 'heroism' of ditchardism, and the Nemesis that dogs it." *Strife* is a beautifully balanced piece. The central theme, the contrasting types, the dialogue, the effective situations, and the very real and highly topical importance of the whole thing struck home to the hearts and minds of the people who saw

Norman McKinnel and Fisher White in the superbly effective production at the Duke of York's Theatre, London, on the 9th of March 1909. Those who had the play brought into their homes on television screens in 1950 were similarly affected.

So many widely different views have been advanced on Galsworthy's approach to his dramatic subjects that it seems desirable, before mentioning his next play, *Justice*, to let the author state his own case. He did so very cogently in the preface to the plays in the Manaton edition of his works:

"I do not know if it is a discovery of mine that Society stands to the modern individual as the gods and other elemental forces stood to the individual Greek; but one has seen it hinted at so often that one inclines to think it must be. In any case it can be understood how a dramatist, strongly and pitifully impressed by the circling pressure of modern environments, predisposed to the naturalistic method, and with something in him of the satirist, will neither create characters seven or even six feet high, nor write plays detached from the movements and problems of his times. He is not conscious, however, of any desire to solve these problems in his plays, or to effect direct reforms. His only ambition in drama, as in his other work, is to present truth as he sees it, and, gripping with it his readers or his audience, to produce in them a sort of mental and moral ferment, whereby vision may be enlarged, imagination livened, and understanding promoted."

It is important to remember, too, that Galsworthy's view of human nature was essentially charitable, although he detested a number of human institutions. One of Sir Max Beerbohm's cartoons depicts Galsworthy, monocle in eye, regarding rather frostily a pig-like being on its hind legs, with a small wreath of roses perched daintily round one ear. The caption is, "Mr. John Galsworthy envisaging Life and giving it—for he is nothing if not judicial—credit for the very best intentions."

Men are not so bad, but the systems they create, the codes and institutions they bring into being are often cruel, and even vile. *Justice*, one of the plays presented by Charles Frohmann during his celebrated repertory season at the Duke of York's Theatre, London, was first produced there on the 21st of February 1910. It is a strong indictment of the English penal system, with special reference to the effects of solitary confinement upon the prisoner. In September 1907 Galsworthy had been over Dartmoor Prison. He visited four or five more prisons afterwards. A long open letter from him to the Home Secretary (Mr. Herbert Gladstone) appeared in the *Nation* in February 1909. In September the Home Secretary saw Galsworthy and informed him that the authorities intended to reduce periods of solitary confinement appreciably. When *Justice* took the stage, Mr. Gladstone had been succeeded as Home Secretary by Mr. Churchill. He modified still further the terms of solitary confinement and saw Galsworthy to tell him so in July 1910.

A practical and much-needed result had been obtained, and the author must have been cheered by it; but although the critics were favourable on the whole, there were still some of them who accused Galsworthy of employing a "photographic" method. They had confused photography with realism, and William Archer dealt with them fairly. "As to photography", he wrote, "we would gladly own the patent for a camera that would select from among the myriad details of a scene as Mr. Galsworthy's art does. It is superbly unphotographic." Archer is right. The dramatist conceived *Justice* as a presentation of the spirit of the whole legal process. He put it on record that no single part of the play can be isolated and criticised without having regard to the sentence: "Justice is a machine." The public accepted it eagerly, and it was one of the few whole-hearted successes of Frohmann's repertory season.

In a letter written to Edward Garnett in 1912 Galsworthy remarked that he saw more and more how literary folk misjudged writing for the stage. "It has all got", he said, "to

be very strong, rather coarse meat to get across those blankety footlights." There is no doubt that there has never been a dramatist who cared less for a popular success than Galsworthy, but he would not have been human if he had been completely insensible to the widespread recognition that is gained for an author by a resounding popular success. *The Silver Box*, *Strife* and *Justice* had made him internationally famous in the theatre, but so far no play of his had achieved a long run. This omission was repaired when Basil Dean produced *The Skin Game* at the St. Martin's Theatre, London, on the 21st of April 1920. It ran there for about a year, and, to use the author's own words, it is "stronger and coarser meat" than anything he had written for the theatre before. It must be understood that these terms are applied only to the author's method. He had broadened his style since he wrote *Justice*. His technical powers and knowledge of stagecraft were greater, and he was dealing with a social problem possessing strong human interest. It was, also, topical. Once more the classes clash. The old, county family is at odds with a brassy, self-made man. As always in Galsworthy's plays, the characterisation is scrupulously fair and so is the statement of the central theme. The auction scene is admirable "theatre", and yet it is difficult to imagine Galsworthy writing it in his earlier period. Although he had no idea that he was making a concession to his audiences, that is exactly what he did. Mrs. Hillcrist, the squire's wife, shows that in extremity she is prepared to ignore all the conventions in order to win, and in the end her husband is left lamenting, "When we began this fight we had clean hands—are they clean now? What's gentility worth if it can't stand fire?"

Mr. J. C. Trewin, in his comprehensive survey *The Theatre since 1900*, calls *The Skin Game* and *Loyalties* "pride-and-prejudice dramas". In these two plays Galsworthy used the "conflict" theme more effectively than he did elsewhere. He was an excellent judge of his own work. When he finished *Loyalties* he was able to say "No manager will refuse this", and indeed he was right. He showed surpassing skill in taking

an abstract idea and turning it into a stage play full of sound characterisation and effective situations. The rich young Jew, Ferdinand De Levis, provides the finest acting part ever created by Galsworthy. His intentions were fully realised by Mr. Ernest Milton. The double bill of *Loyalties* and Sir James Barrie's one act *Shall We Join The Ladies*, brilliantly directed by Mr. Basil Dean, offered London playgoers at the St. Martin's Theatre in 1922 one of the most rewarding opportunities they have ever had. Only at the play's end does the author's intention become fully clear. Loyalty is not enough. There must also be understanding and charity, and that is a point that Galsworthy continued to make throughout his working life.

Windows, produced at the Royal Court Theatre six weeks after the first night of *Loyalties*, was not destined to prosper. It has fun and wit, and as usual there are social problems to be aired. If it had not had to stand comparison with the all-conquering *Loyalties* it would probably have enjoyed a much longer run. Galsworthy himself thought that it was a play which defied casting and would always seem more effective read than acted.

Old English had its first production at the Haymarket Theatre, London, on the 21st of October 1924. Sylvanus Heythorp, the tough old voluptuary, sprang vividly to life in the person of that fine actor, Norman McKinnel. Heythorp had made his first appearance in 1917 as the principal character of a short story, *A Stoic*, and he was derived from an earlier Galsworthy personage, Anthony Thornworthy. The critics felt, with few exceptions, that although the part of Heythorp offered a wonderful acting opportunity, the play was not strong or vivid enough to support him. In America George Arliss made a considerable hit in this rôle.

Escape, under the management of Leon M. Lion, afterwards an indefatigable reviver of the Galsworthy plays, appeared at the Ambassadors' Theatre, London, on the 12th of August 1926, and ran for about a year. Mr. Nicholas Hannen made one of the greatest successes of his career as Matt Denant,

the escaped convict. *Escape* is a play full of drama and tense situations. There is much vivid contrast. An audience in search of first-class entertainment received it in full measure. They did not need to trouble their heads about the author's deeper intention. It tells a good story vividly and directly. Galsworthy denied that he had written it with any special "purpose". He was content to take the incident of Matt Denant's break for freedom and the events that followed it. There is fine craftsmanship here and an inevitability that grips. The credulity of the audience is never strained. Although *Escape* is written in a prologue and nine episodes, a form that does not help the dramatist, it has many of the qualities to be found in *The Skin Game* and *Loyalties*. At the time of its production Galsworthy announced that it was the last play he intended to write. He did not keep to this decision, although he may have wished that he had done so. Neither *Exiled* (1929) nor *The Roof*, his last play, produced by Mr. Basil Dean at the Vaudeville Theatre, London, on the 5th of November 1929, attracted the public. *The Roof* deserved a happier fate. It is written as a series of episodes in a French hotel, culminating in a fire. This scene presents immense technical difficulties to the producer. In order to have the play in perfect order for the official first night at the Vaudeville, Galsworthy had it performed previously for a week at Golders Green. There, audiences were enthusiastic, but the dramatic critics were not invited and only one, the representative of the *Morning Post*, found his way to the theatre and gave the play a good notice.

When *The Roof* came to the West End of London it met with faint praise. Mr. Sydney Carroll recognised it as an attempt by a first-class dramatist "to reflect the cinematographic aspect of modern life in its episodic and disconnected aspects". He acknowledged its nobility, fineness of quality, beauty of thought, and strength of treatment. If *The Roof* had been the work of an unknown playwright it would have attracted much favourable comment. One character, Lennox, is allowed to voice Galsworthy's views on the novelist's task.

"That's my job", he says, "to tell how people feel and think by the way they don't look and act. There's one thing, we're all better, or at least more vivid, than we seem. Life's a pagoda. We hatch in the basement and take wings on the roof, and in between we live masked in a sort of unending bluff, and who knows what we're really like?"

All his life Galsworthy tried to discover and to reveal in his works the answer to that question. Of the plays not printed in this book, *The Pigeon* has a charm and insight that makes it effective in performance and very readable at home. In it there is the pleasant scapegrace, Ferrand, "the only person I ever lifted clean out of life. . . . He was an exceptional vagabond in every way, and that's what makes him a voice, the spirit of vagabondage was expressed by him, articulately. Most are not articulate." In *The Pigeon* Galsworthy put forward the idea that we are all human beings and not physiological specimens, and all reform uninspired by sympathy and understanding is dead wood in our tree.

This fine idea runs through all the Galsworthy plays and novels. He was a writer inspired by the highest ideals, who gave of his best, as far as he was able, whenever he put pen to paper. No wonder that when he was awarded the Order of Merit, Sir William Rothenstein wrote that "No two names more worthily represent the integrity of the arts than your's and Bridges".

One of the most acute and friendly of Galsworthy's critics, Joseph Conrad, called him a humanitarian moralist. "A moralist", Conrad continued, "must present us with a gospel—he must give counsel, not to our reason or sentiment, but to our very soul. Do you feel in yourself the stature for that task? That you must meditate over with great seriousness." There is no doubt that Galsworthy had done so, often. He gave expression to human problems, but he reiterated, in his letters and elsewhere, that he treated these themes as an artist. He left the remedies to others, and in taking up this attitude, he showed a clear understanding of the limitations of his own

abilities. He was gentle, fastidious, and tolerant, a fine novelist and playwright, a good man.

A member of an old Devonshire family, he was born on the 14th of August 1867, the eldest son and second child of the four children of John Galsworthy and his wife, *née* Blanche Bartleet, at Kingston, Surrey. He was educated at Harrow, and at New College, Oxford. Called to the Bar in 1890, he practised very little. His marriage to Ada Cooper, the daughter of a Norwich doctor, turned out to be supremely happy. Mrs. Galsworthy was always the helpful friend and companion who worked unobtrusively with her husband in the theatre and travelled with him in many parts of the world. She first suggested to him that he should write, and after they were married assisted his authorship in every way that lay within her power. Galsworthy's gratitude was shown publicly in the dedications of *The Forsyte Saga* and *A Modern Comedy* to her, "being in the opinion of its author the best of his work, and the fittest to be dedicated to the dearest and most lovely companion, the most faithful helpmate, and best natural critic a man ever had".

After writing four books which were published as by "John Sinjohn", Galsworthy issued *The Island Pharisees* in 1904, and revealed himself as the author. It was the first of the long series of works of fiction in which he dealt with the decline and social changes affecting the upper middle classes. The novels have the qualities which have been mentioned in dealing with the plays, but they give the author a wider opportunity for using his considerable narrative gifts and his delicate sense of beauty. He was able to turn from fiction to drama with the greatest ease. In fact, the one medium seemed to provide him with relaxation from the other.

As his fame increased and, in time, became international, Galsworthy became a world-famous figure in the world of letters. President of the P.E.N. Club—an international association of authors—winner of the Nobel Prize, a recipient of the Order of Merit, various foreign decorations, and honorary

doctorates of many universities, he received recognition in his lifetime such as has been given to few other men.

Always modest and friendly, and responsive to every honest demand that was made upon him, he died on the 31st of January 1933. His body was cremated at Woking on the 3rd of February, and the Dean of Westminster conducted a Memorial Service in Westminster Abbey on the 9th of February. At his own wish, his ashes were scattered at the top of Bury Hill, in West Sussex, on the 28th of March 1933.

ERIC GILLET

THE SILVER BOX

CAST OF THE ORIGINAL PRODUCTION AT
THE ROYAL COURT THEATRE, LONDON,
ON SEPTEMBER 25, 1906 \

JOHN BARTHWICK, M.P..	.	<i>Mr. James Hearn</i>
MRS. BARTHWICK .	.	<i>Miss Frances Ivor</i>
JACK BARTHWICK .	.	<i>Mr. A. E. Matthews</i>
ROPER .	.	<i>Mr. A. Goodsall</i>
MRS. JONES .	.	<i>Miss Irene Rooke</i>
MARLOW .	.	<i>Mr. Frederick Lloyd</i>
WHEELER .	.	<i>Miss Gertrude Hemiques</i>
JONES .	.	<i>Mr. Norman McKinnell</i>
MRS. SEDDON.	.	<i>Mrs. Charles Maltby</i>
SNOW .	.	<i>Mr. Trevor Lowe</i>
A POLICE MAGISTRATE .	.	<i>Mr. Athol Forde</i>
AN UNKNOWN LADY .	.	<i>Miss Sydney Fairbrother</i>
LIVENS.	.	<i>Mr. Edmund Gurney</i>
RELIEVING OFFICER .	.	<i>Mr. Edmund Givern</i>
MAGISTRATE'S CLERK .	.	<i>Mr. Lewis Casson</i>
USHER .	.	<i>Mr. Norman Page</i>

ACT I

SCENE I

The curtain rises on the BARTHWICKS' dining-room, large, modern, and well furnished; the window curtains drawn. Electric light is burning. On the large round dining-table is set out a tray with whisky, a syphon, and a silver cigarette-box. It is past midnight.

A fumbling is heard outside the door. It is opened suddenly; JACK BARTHWICK seems to fall into the room. He stands holding by the door knob, staring before him, with a beatific smile. He is in evening dress and opera hat, and carries in his hand a sky-blue velvet lady's reticule. His boyish face is freshly coloured and clean-shaven. An overcoat is hanging on his arm.

JACK. Hallo! I've got home all ri—— [*Defiantly.*] Who says I sh'd never've opened th' door without 'sistance. [*He staggers in, fumbling with the reticule. A lady's handkerchief and purse of crimson silk fall out.*] Serve her joll' well right—everything droppin' out. Th' cat. I've scored her off—I've got her bag. [*He swings the reticule.*] Serves her joll' well right. [*He takes a cigarette out of the silver box and puts it in his mouth.*] Never gave tha' fellow anything! [*He hunts through all his pockets and pulls a shilling out; it drops and rolls away. He looks for it.*] Beastly shilling! [*He looks again.*] Base ingratitude! Absolutely nothing. [*He laughs.*] Mus' tell him I've got absolutely nothing.

[He lurches through the door and down a corridor, and presently returns, followed by JONES, who is advanced in liquor. JONES, about thirty years of age, has hollow cheeks, black circles round his eyes, and rusty clothes. He looks as though he might be unemployed, and enters in a hang-dog manner.]

JACK. Sh! sh! sh! Don't you make a noise, whatever you do. Shu' the door, an' have a drink. [*Very solemnly.*] You helped me to open the door—I've got nothin' for you. This is my house. My father's name's Barthwick; he's Member of Parliament—Liberal Member of Parliament: I've told you that before. Have a drink! [*He pours out whisky and drinks it up.*] I'm not drunk—— [*Subsiding on a sofa.*] Tha's all right. Wha's your name? My name's Barthwick, so's my father's; I'm a Liberal too—wha're you?

JONES. [*In a thick, sardonic voice*] I'm a bloomin' Conservative. My name's Jones! My wife works 'ere; she's the char; she works 'ere.

JACK. Jones? [*He laughs.*] There's 'nother Jones at college with me. I'm not a Socialist myself; I'm a Liberal—there's ve-lill difference, because of the principles of the Lib—Liberal Party. We're all equal before the law—tha's rot, tha's silly. [*Laughs.*] Wha' was I about to say? Give me some whisky. [*JONES gives him the whisky he desires, together with a squirt of syphon.*] Wha' I was goin' tell you was—I've had a row with her. [*He waves the reticule.*] Have a drink, Jones—sh'd never have got in without you—tha's why I'm giving you a drink. Don' care who knows I've scored her off. Th' cat! [*He throws his feet up on the sofa.*] Don' you make a noise, whatever you do. You pour out a drink—you make yourself good long, long drink—you take cigarette—you take anything you like. Sh'd never have got in without you. [*Closing his eyes.*] You're a Tory—you're a Tory Socialist. I'm Liberal myself—have a drink—I'm an excel'nt chap.

[*His head drops back. He, smiling, falls asleep, and JONES stands looking at him; then, snatching up JACK's glass, he drinks it off. He picks the reticule from off JACK's shirt-front, holds it to the light, and smells at it.*]

JONES. Been on the tiles and brought 'ome some of yer cat's fur. [*He stuffs it into JACK's breast pocket.*]

JACK. [*Murmuring*] I've scored you off! You cat!

[*JONES looks around him furtively; he pours out whisky and*

drinks it. From the silver box he takes a cigarette, puffs at it, and drinks more whisky. There is no sobriety left in him.

JONES. Fat lot o' things they've got 'ere! [*He sees the crimson purse lying on the floor.*] More cat's fur. Puss, puss! [*He fingers it, drops it on the tray, and looks at JACK.*] Calf! Fat calf! [*He sees his own presentment in a mirror. Lifting his hands, with fingers spread, he stares at it; then looks again at JACK, clenching his fist as if to batter in his sleeping, smiling face. Suddenly he tilts the rest of the whisky into the glass and drinks it. With cunning glee he takes the silver box and purse and pockets them.*] I'll score you off too, that's wot I'll do!

[*He gives a little snarling laugh and lurches to the door. His shoulder rubs against the switch; the light goes out. There is a sound as of a closing outer door.*

The curtain falls.

The curtain rises again at once.

SCENE II

In the BARTHWICKS' dining-room. JACK is still asleep; the morning light is coming through the curtains. The time is half-past eight. WHEELER, brisk person, enters with a dust-pan, and MRS. JONES more slowly with a scuttle.

WHEELER. [*Drawing the curtains*] That precious husband of yours was round for you after you'd gone yesterday, Mrs. Jones. Wanted your money for drink, I suppose. He hangs about the corner here half the time. I saw him outside the "Goat and Bells" when I went to the post last night. If I were you I wouldn't live with him. I wouldn't live with a man that raised his hand to me. I wouldn't put up with it. Why don't you take the children and leave him? If you put up with 'im it'll only make him worse. I never can see why, because a man's married you, he should knock you about.

MRS. JONES. [*Slim, dark-eyed, and dark-haired; oval-faced, and with a smooth, soft, even voice; her manner patient, her way*

of talking quite impersonal; she wears a blue linen dress, and boots with holes] It was nearly two last night before he come home, and he wasn't himself. He made me get up, and he knocked me about; he didn't seem to know *what* he was saying or doing. Of course I *would* leave him, but I'm really afraid of what he'd do to me. He's such a violent man when he's not himself.

WHEELER. Why don't you get him locked up? You'll never have any peace until you get him locked up. If I were you I'd go to the police court to-morrow. That's what I would do.

MRS. JONES. Of course I ought to go, because he does treat me so badly when he's not himself. But you see, Bettina, he has a very hard time—he's been out of work two months, and it preys upon his mind. When he's in work he behaves himself much better. It's when he's out of work that he's so violent.

WHEELER. Well, if you won't take any steps you'll never get rid of him.

MRS. JONES. Of course it's very wearing to me; I don't get my sleep at nights. And it's not as if I were getting help from him, because I have to do for the children and all of us. And he throws such dreadful things up at me, talks of my having men to follow me about. Such a thing never happens; no man ever speaks to me. And of course it's just the other way. It's what he does that's wrong and makes me so unhappy. And then he's always threatenin' to cut my throat if I leave him. It's all the drink, and things preying on his mind; he's not a bad man really. Sometimes he'll speak quite kind to me, but I've stood so much from him, I don't feel it in me to speak kind back, but just keep myself to myself. And he's all right with the children too, except when he's not himself.

WHEELER. You mean when he's drunk, the beauty.

MRS. JONES. Yes. [*Without change of voice.*] There's the young gentleman asleep on the sofa.

[*They both look silently at JACK.*]

MRS. JONES. [*At last, in her soft voice*] He doesn't look quite himself.

WHEELER. He's a young limb, that what he is. It's my belief he was tipsy last night, like your husband. It's another kind of bein' out of work that sets *him* to drink. I'll go and tell Marlow. This is his job. *[She goes.]*

[MRS. JONES, upon her knees, begins a gentle sweeping.]

JACK. *[Waking]* Who's there? What is it?

MRS. JONES. It's me, sir, Mrs. Jones.

JACK. *[Sitting up and looking round]* Where is it—what—what time is it?

MRS. JONES. It's getting on for nine o'clock, sir.

JACK. For nine! Why—what! *[Rising, and loosening his tongue; putting hand to his head, and staring hard at MRS. JONES.]* Look here, you, Mrs.—Mrs. Jones—don't you say you caught me asleep here.

MRS. JONES. No, sir, of course I won't, sir.

JACK. It's quite an accident; I don't know how it happened. I must have forgotten to go to bed. It's a queer thing. I've got a most beastly headache. Mind you don't say anything, Mrs. Jones.

[Goes out and passes MARLOW in the doorway. MARLOW is young and quiet; he is clean-shaven, and his hair is brushed high from his forehead in a coxcomb. Incidentally a butler, he is first a man. He looks at MRS. JONES, and smiles a private smile.]

MARLOW. Not the first time, and won't be the last. Looked a bit dicky, eh, Mrs. Jones?

MRS. JONES. He didn't look quite himself. Of course I didn't take notice.

MARLOW. You're used to them. How's your old man?

MRS. JONES. *[Softly as throughout]* Well, he was very bad last night; he didn't seem to know what he was about. He was very late, and he was most abusive. But now, of course, he's asleep.

MARLOW. That's his way of finding a job, eh?

MRS. JONES. As a rule, Mr. Marlow, he goes out early every morning looking for work, and sometimes he comes in

fit to drop—and of course I can't say he doesn't try to get it, because he does. Trade's very bad. [*She stands quite still, her pan and brush before her, at the beginning and the end of long vistas of experience, traversing them with her impersonal eye.*] But he's not a good husband to me—last night he hit me, and he was so dreadfully abusive.

MARLOW. Bank 'oliday, eh! He's too fond of the "Goat and Bells," that's what's the matter with him. I see him at the corner late every night. He hangs about.

MRS. JONES. He gets to feeling very low walking about all day after work, and being refused so often, and then when he gets a drop in him it goes to his head. But he shouldn't treat his wife as he treats me. Sometimes I've had to go and walk about at night, when he wouldn't let me stay in the room; but he's sorry for it afterwards. And he hangs about after me, he waits for me in the street; and I don't think he ought to, because I've always been a good wife to him. And I tell him Mrs. Barthwick wouldn't like him coming about the place. But that only makes him angry, and he says dreadful things about the gentry. Of course it was through me that he first lost his place, through his not treating me right; and that's made him bitter against the gentry. He had a very good place as groom in the country; but it made such a stir, because of course he didn't treat me right.

MARLOW. Got the sack?

MRS. JONES. Yes; his employer said he couldn't keep him, because there was a great deal of talk; and he said it was such a bad example. But it's very important for me to keep my work here; I have the three children, and I don't want him to come about after me in the streets, and make a disturbance as he sometimes does.

MARLOW. [*Holding up the empty decanter*] Not a drain! Next time he hits you get a witness and go down to the court——

MRS. JONES. Yes, I think I've made up my mind. I think I ought to.

MARLOW. That's right. Where's the ciga——? [*He*

searches for the silver box; he looks at MRS. JONES, who is sweeping on her hands and knees; he checks himself and stands reflecting. From the tray he picks two half-smoked cigarettes, and reads the name of them.] Nestor—where the deuce——?

[With a meditative air he looks again at MRS. JONES, and, taking up JACK's overcoat, he searches in the pockets. WHEELER, with a tray of breakfast things, comes in.]

MARLOW. *[Aside to WHEELER]* Have you seen the cigarette-box?

WHEELER. No.

MARLOW. Well, it's gone. I put it on the tray last night. And he's been smoking *[Showing her the ends of cigarette.]* It's not in these pockets. He can't have taken it upstairs this morning! Have a good look in his room when he comes down. Who's been in here?

WHEELER. Only me and Mrs. Jones.

MRS. JONES. I've finished here; shall I do the drawing-room now?

WHEELER. *[Looking at her doubtfully]* Have you seen—— Better do the boudwower first.

[MRS. JONES goes out with pan and brush. MARLOW and WHEELER look each other in the face.]

MARLOW. It'll turn up.

WHEELER. *[Hesitating]* You don't think *she*—— *[Nodding at the door.]*

MARLOW. *[Stoutly]* I don't—I never believes anything of anybody.

WHEELER. But the master'll have to be told.

MARLOW. You wait a bit, and see if it don't turn up. Suspicion's no business of ours. I set my mind against it.

The curtain falls.

The curtain rises again at once.

SCENE III

BARTHWICK and MRS. BARTHWICK are seated at the breakfast table. He is a man between fifty and sixty; quietly important, with a bald forehead, and pince-nez, and "The Times" in his hand. She is a lady of nearly fifty, well dressed, with greyish hair, good features, and a decided manner. They face each other.

BARTHWICK. [*From behind his paper*] The Labour man has got in at the by-election for Barnside, my dear.

MRS. BARTHWICK. Another Labour? I can't think what on earth the country is about.

BARTHWICK. I predicted it. It's not a matter of vast importance.

MRS. BARTHWICK. Not? How can you take it so calmly, John? To me it's simply outrageous. And there you sit, you Liberals, and pretend to encourage these people!

BARTHWICK. [*Frowning*] The representation of all parties is necessary for any proper reform, for any proper social policy.

MRS. BARTHWICK. I've no patience with your talk of reform—all that nonsense about social policy. We know perfectly well what it is they want; they want things for themselves. Those Socialists and Labour men are an absolutely selfish set of people. They have no sense of patriotism, like the upper classes, *they simply want what we've got*.

BARTHWICK. Want what we've got! [*He stares into space.*] My dear, what are you talking about? [*With a contortion.*] I'm no alarmist.

MRS. BARTHWICK. Cream? Quite uneducated men! Wait until they begin to tax our investments. I'm convinced that when they once get a chance they will tax everything—they've no feeling for the country. You Liberals and Conservatives, you're all alike; you don't see an inch before your noses.

You've no imagination, not a scrap of imagination between you. You ought to join hands and nip it in the bud.

BARTHWICK. You're talking nonsense! How is it possible for Liberals and Conservatives to join hands, as you call it? That shows how absurd it is for women—— Why, the very essence of a Liberal is to trust in the people!

MRS. BARTHWICK. Now, John, eat your breakfast. As if there were any real difference between you and the Conservatives. All the upper classes have the same interests to protect, and the same principles. [*Calmly.*] Oh! you're sitting upon a volcano, John.

BARTHWICK. What!

MRS. BARTHWICK. I read a letter in the paper yesterday. I forget the man's name, but it made the whole thing perfectly clear. You don't look things in the face.

BARTHWICK. Indeed! [*Heavily.*] I am a Liberal. Drop the subject, please!

MRS. BARTHWICK. Toast? I quite agree with what this man says: Education is simply ruining the lower classes. It unsettles them, and that's the worst thing for us all. I see an enormous difference in the manner of servants.

BARTHWICK. [*With suspicious emphasis*] I welcome any change that will lead to something better. [*He opens a letter.*] H'm! This is that affair of Master Jack's again. "High Street, Oxford. Sir, We have received Mr. John Barthwick, Senior's, draft for forty pounds." Oh! the letter's to him! "We now enclose the cheque you cashed with us, which, as we stated in our previous letter, was not met on presentation at your bank. We are, Sir, yours obediently, Moss and Sons, Tailors." H'm! [*Staring at the cheque.*] A pretty business altogether! The boy might have been prosecuted.

MRS. BARTHWICK. Come, John, you know Jack didn't mean anything; he only thought he was overdrawing. I still think his bank ought to have cashed that cheque. They must know your position.

BARTHWICK. [*Replacing in the envelope the letter and the*

cheque] Much good that would have done him in a court of law. [*He stops as JACK comes in, fastening his waistcoat and staunching a razor cut upon his chin.*]

JACK. [*Sitting down between them, and speaking with an artificial joviality*] Sorry I'm late. [*He looks lugubriously at the dishes.*] Tea, please, mother. Any letters for me? [*BARTHWICK hands the letter to him.*] But look here, I say, this has been opened! I do wish you wouldn't——

BARTHWICK. [*Touching the envelope*] I suppose I'm entitled to this name.

JACK. [*Sulkily*] Well, I can't help having your name, father! [*He reads the letter, and mutters.*] Brutes.

BARTHWICK. [*Eyeing him*] You don't deserve to be so well out of that.

JACK. Haven't you ragged me enough, dad?

MRS. BARTHWICK. Yes, John, let Jack have his breakfast.

BARTHWICK. If you hadn't had me to come to, where would you have been? It's the merest accident—suppose you had been the son of a poor man or a clerk. Obtaining money with a cheque you knew your bank could not meet. It might have ruined you for life. I can't see what's to become of you if these are your principles. I never did anything of the sort myself.

JACK. I expect you always had lots of money. If you've got plenty of money, of course——

BARTHWICK. On the contrary, I had not your advantages. My father kept me very short of money.

JACK. How much had you, dad?

BARTHWICK. It's not material. The question is, do you feel the gravity of what you did?

JACK. I don't know about the gravity. Of course, I'm very sorry if you think it was wrong. Haven't I said so! I should never have done it at all if I hadn't been so jolly hard up.

BARTHWICK. How much of that forty pounds have you got left, Jack?

JACK. [*Hesitating*] I don't know—not much.

BARTHWICK. How much?

JACK. [*Desperately*] I haven't got any.

BARTHWICK. What?

JACK. I know I've got the most beastly headache.

[*He leans his head on his hand.*]

MRS. BARTHWICK. Headache? My dear boy! Can't you eat any breakfast?

JACK. [*Drawing in his breath*] Too jolly bad!

MRS. BARTHWICK. I'm so sorry. Come with me, dear; I'll give you something that will take it away at once.

[*They leave the room; and BARTHWICK, tearing up the letter, goes to the fireplace and puts the pieces in the fire. While he is doing this MARLOW comes in, and, looking round him, is about quietly to withdraw.*]

BARTHWICK. What's that? What d'you want?

MARLOW. I was looking for Mr. John, sir.

BARTHWICK. What d'you want Mr. John for?

MARLOW. [*With hesitation*] I thought I should find him here, sir.

BARTHWICK. [*Suspiciously*] Yes, but what do you want him for?

MARLOW. [*Offhandedly*] There's a lady called—asked to speak to him for a minute, sir.

BARTHWICK. A lady, at this time of the morning. What sort of a lady?

MARLOW. [*Without expression in his voice*] I can't tell, sir; no particular sort. She might be after charity. She might be a Sister of Mercy, I should think, sir.

BARTHWICK. Is she dressed like one?

MARLOW. No, sir, she's in plain clothes, sir.

BARTHWICK. Didn't she say what she wanted?

MARLOW. No, sir.

BARTHWICK. Where did you leave her?

MARLOW. In the hall, sir.

BARTHWICK. In the hall? How do you know she's not a thief—not got designs on the house?

MARLOW. No, sir, I don't fancy so, sir.

BARTHWICK. Well, show her in here; I'll see her myself.

[MARLOW goes out with a private gesture of dismay. He soon returns, ushering in a young pale lady with dark eyes and pretty figure, in a modish, black, but rather shabby dress, a black and white trimmed hat with a bunch of Parma violets wrongly placed, and fuzzy-spotted veil. At the sight of Mr. BARTHWICK she exhibits every sign of nervousness. MARLOW goes out.]

UNKNOWN LADY. Oh! but—I beg pardon—there's some mistake—I—— [She turns to fly.]

BARTHWICK. Whom did you want to see, madam?

UNKNOWN. [Stopping and looking back] It was Mr. John Barthwick I wanted to see.

BARTHWICK. I am John Barthwick, madam. What can I have the pleasure of doing for you?

UNKNOWN. Oh! I—I don't—— [She drops her eyes. BARTHWICK scrutinizes her, and purses his lips.]

BARTHWICK. It was my son, perhaps, you wished to see?

UNKNOWN. [Quickly] Yes, of course, it's your son.

BARTHWICK. May I ask whom I have the pleasure of speaking to?

UNKNOWN. [Appeal and hardiness upon her face] My name is—oh! it doesn't matter—I don't want to make any fuss. I just want to see your son for a minute. [Boldly.] In fact, I must see him.

BARTHWICK. [Controlling his uneasiness] My son is not very well. If necessary, no doubt I could attend to the matter; be so kind as to let me know——

UNKNOWN. Oh! but I must see him—I've come on purpose—— [She bursts out nervously.] I don't want to make any fuss, but the fact is, last—last night your son took away—he took away my—— [She stops.]

BARTHWICK. [Severely] Yes, madam, what?

UNKNOWN. He took away my—my reticule.

BARTHWICK. Your reti——?

UNKNOWN. I don't care about the reticule; it's not *that*

I want—I'm sure I don't want to make any fuss—[*her face is quivering*]*—but—but—all my money was in it!*

BARTHWICK. In what—in what?

UNKNOWN. In my purse, in the reticule. It was a crimson silk purse. Really, I wouldn't have come—I don't want to make any fuss. But I must get my money back—mustn't I?

BARTHWICK. Do you tell me that my son——?

UNKNOWN. Oh! well, you see, he wasn't quite—I mean he was—— [*She smiles mesmerically.*]

BARTHWICK. I beg your pardon.

UNKNOWN. [*Stamping her foot*] Oh! don't you see—tipsy! We had a quarrel.

BARTHWICK. [*Scandalized*] How? Where?

UNKNOWN. [*Defiantly*] At my place. We'd had supper at the—— and your son——

BARTHWICK. [*Pressing the bell*] May I ask how you knew this house? Did he give you his name and address?

UNKNOWN. [*Glancing sidelong*] I got it out of his overcoat.

BARTHWICK. [*Sardonically*] Oh! you got it out of his overcoat. And may I ask if my son will know you by daylight?

UNKNOWN. Know me? I should jolly—I mean, of course he will! [*MARLOW comes in.*]

BARTHWICK. Ask Mr. John to come down.

[*MARLOW goes out, and BARTHWICK walks uneasily about.*]
And how long have you enjoyed his acquaintanceship?

UNKNOWN. Only since—only since Good Friday.

BARTHWICK. I am at a loss—I repeat I am at a loss——

[*He glances at this unknown lady, who stands with eyes cast down, twisting her hands. And suddenly JACK appears. He stops on seeing who is here, and the unknown lady hysterically giggles. There is a silence.*]

BARTHWICK. [*Portentously*] This young—er—lady says that last night—I think you said last night, madam—you took away——

UNKNOWN. [*Impulsively*] My reticule, and all my money was in a crimson silk purse.

JACK. Reticule. [*Looking round for any chance to get away.*] I don't know anything about it.

BARTHWICK. [*Sharply*] Come, do you deny seeing this young lady last night?

JACK. Deny? No, of course. [*Whispering*] Why did you give me away like this? What on earth did you come here for?

UNKNOWN. [*Tearfully*] I'm sure I didn't want to—it's not likely, is it? You snatched it out of my hand—you know you did—and the purse had all my money in it. I didn't follow you last night because I didn't want to make a fuss and it was so late, and you were so——

BARTHWICK. Come, sir, don't turn your back on me—explain!

JACK. [*Desperately*] I don't remember anything about it. [*In a low voice to his friend*] Why on earth couldn't you have written?

UNKNOWN. [*Sullenly*] I want it now; I must have it—I've got to pay my rent to-day. [*She looks at BARTHWICK.*] They're only too glad to jump on people who are not—not *well off*.

JACK. I don't remember anything about it, really I don't remember anything about last night at all. [*He puts his hand up to his head.*] It's all—cloudy, and I've got such a beastly headache.

UNKNOWN. But you *took* it; you know you did. You said you'd score me off.

JACK. Well, then, it must be here. I remember now—I remember something. Why did I take the beastly thing?

BARTHWICK. Yes, why did you take the beastly——

[*He turns abruptly to the window.*]

UNKNOWN. [*With her mesmeric smile*] You weren't quite——were you?

JACK. [*Smiling pallidly*] I'm *awfully* sorry. If there's anything I can do——

BARTHWICK. Do? You can restore this property, I suppose.

JACK. I'll go and have a look, but I really don't think I've got it.

[*He goes out hurriedly. And BARTHWICK, placing a chair, motions to the visitor to sit; then, with pursed lips, he stands and eyes her fixedly. She sits, and steals a look at him; then turns away, and, drawing up her veil, stealthily wipes her eyes. And JACK comes back.*

JACK. [*Ruefully holding out the empty reticule*] Is that the thing? I've looked all over—I can't find the purse anywhere. Are you sure it was there?

UNKNOWN. [*Tearfully*] Sure? Of course I'm sure. A crimson silk purse. It was all the money I had.

JACK. I really am awfully sorry—my head's so jolly bad. I've asked the butler, but he hasn't seen it.

UNKNOWN. I *must* have my money—

JACK. Oh! Of course—that'll be all right; I'll see that that's all right. How much?

UNKNOWN. [*Sullenly*] Seven pounds—twelve—it's all I've got in the world.

JACK. That'll be all right; I'll—send you a—cheque.

UNKNOWN. [*Eagerly*] No; now, please. Give me what was in my purse; I've got to pay my rent this morning. They won't give me another day; I'm a fortnight behind already.

JACK. [*Blankly*] I'm awfully sorry; I really haven't a penny in my pocket. [*He glances stealthily at BARTHWICK.*

UNKNOWN. [*Excitedly*] Come, I say you must—it's my money, and you took it. I'm not going away without it. They'll turn me out of my place.

JACK. [*Clasping his head*] But I can't give you what I haven't got. Don't I tell you I haven't a beastly penny?

UNKNOWN. [*Tearing at her handkerchief*] Oh! do give it me! [*She puts her hands together in appeal; then, with sudden fierceness.*] If you don't I'll summons you. It's stealing, that's what it is!

BARTHWICK. [*Uneasily*] One moment, please. As a matter of—er—principle, I shall settle this claim. [*He produces*

money.] Here is eight pounds; the extra will cover the value of the purse and your cab fares. I need make no comment—no thanks are necessary.

[*Touching the bell, he holds the door ajar in silence. The unknown lady stores the money in her reticule, she looks from JACK to BARTHWICK, and her face is quivering faintly with a smile. She hides it with her hand, and steals away. Behind her BARTHWICK shuts the door.*]

BARTHWICK. [*With solemnity*] H'm! This is a nice thing to happen!

JACK. [*Impersonally*] What awful luck!

BARTHWICK. So this is the way that forty pounds has gone! One thing after another! Once more I should like to know where you'd have been if it hadn't been for me! You don't seem to have any principles. You—you're one of those who are a nuisance to society; you—you're dangerous! What your mother would say I don't know. Your conduct, as far as I can see, is absolutely unjustifiable. It's—it's criminal. Why, a poor man who behaved as you've done . . . d'you think he'd have any mercy shown him? What you want is a good lesson. You and your sort are—[*he speaks with feeling*—a nuisance to the community. Don't ask me to help you next time. You're not fit to be helped.

JACK. [*Turning upon his sire, with unexpected fierceness*] All right, I won't then, and see how you like it. You wouldn't have helped me this time, I know, if you hadn't been scared the thing would get into the papers. Where are the cigarettes?

BARTHWICK. [*Regarding him uneasily*] Well—I'll say no more about it. [*He rings the bell.*] I'll pass it over for this once, but—[*MARLOW comes in.*] You can clear away. [*He hides his face behind "The Times."*]

JACK. [*Brightening*] I say, Marlow, where are the cigarettes?

MARLOW. I put the box out with the whisky last night, sir, but this morning I can't find it anywhere.

JACK. Did you look in my room?

MARLOW. Yes, sir; I've looked all over the house. I

found two Nestor ends in the tray this morning, so you must have been smokin' last night, sir. [*Hesitating.*] I'm really afraid some one's purloined the box.

JACK. [*Uneasily*] Stolen it!

BARTHWICK. What's that? The cigarette-box! Is anything else missing?

MARLOW. No, sir; I've been through the plate.

BARTHWICK. Was the house all right this morning? None of the windows open?

MARLOW. No, sir. [*Quietly to JACK.*] You left your latchkey in the door last night, sir.

[*He hands it back, unseen by BARTHWICK.*]

JACK. Tst!

BARTHWICK. Who's been in the room this morning?

MARLOW. Me and Wheeler, and Mrs. Jones is all, sir, as far as I know.

BARTHWICK. Have you asked Mrs. Barthwick? [*To JACK.*] Go and ask your mother if she's had it; ask her to look and see if she's missed anything else. [*JACK goes upon his mission.*] Nothing is more disquieting than losing things like this.

MARLOW. No, sir.

BARTHWICK. Have you any suspicions?

MARLOW. No, sir.

BARTHWICK. This Mrs. JONES—how long has she been working here?

MARLOW. Only this last month, sir.

BARTHWICK. What sort of person?

MARLOW. I don't know much about her, sir; seems a very quiet, respectable woman.

BARTHWICK. Who did the room this morning?

MARLOW. Wheeler and Mrs. Jones, sir.

BARTHWICK. [*With his forefinger upraised*] Now, was this Mrs. Jones in the room alone at any time?

MARLOW. [*Expressionless*] Yes, sir.

BARTHWICK. How do you know that?

MARLOW. [*Reluctantly*] I found her here, sir.

BARTHWICK. And has Wheeler been in the room alone?

MARLOW. No, sir, she's not, sir. I should say, sir, that Mrs. Jones seems a very honest——

BARTHWICK. [*Holding up his hand*] I want to know this: Has this Mrs. Jones been here the whole morning?

MARLOW. Yes, sir—no, sir—she stepped over to the green-grocer's for cook.

BARTHWICK. H'm! Is she in the house now?

MARLOW. Yes, sir.

BARTHWICK. Very good. I shall make a point of clearing this up. On principle I shall make a point of fixing the responsibility; it goes to the foundations of security. In all your interests——

MARLOW. Yes, sir.

BARTHWICK. What sort of circumstances is this Mrs. Jones in? Is her husband in work?

MARLOW. I believe not, sir.

BARTHWICK. Very well. Say nothing about it to anyone. Tell Wheeler not to speak of it, and ask Mrs. Jones to step up here.

MARLOW. Very good, sir.

[MARLOW goes out, his face concerned; and BARTHWICK stays, his face judicial and a little pleased, as befits a man conducting an inquiry. MRS. BARTHWICK and her son come in.]

BARTHWICK. Well, my dear, you've not seen it, I suppose?

MRS. BARTHWICK. No. But what an extraordinary thing, John! Marlow, of course, is out of the question. I'm certain none of the maids—— As for cook!

BARTHWICK. Oh, cook!

MRS. BARTHWICK. Of course! It's perfectly detestable to me to suspect anybody.

BARTHWICK. It is not a question of one's feelings. It's a question of justice. On principle——

MRS. BARTHWICK. I shouldn't be a bit surprised if the

charwoman knew something about it. It was Laura who recommended her.

BARTHWICK. [*Judicially*] I am going to have Mrs. Jones up. Leave it to me; and—er—remember that nobody is guilty until they're proved so. I shall be careful. I have no intention of frightening her; I shall give her every chance. I hear she's in poor circumstances. If we are not able to do much for them we are bound to have the greatest sympathy with the poor. [MRS. JONES *comes in.*] [*Pleasantly*] Oh! good morning, Mrs. Jones.

MRS. JONES. [*Soft, and even, unemphatic*] Good morning, sir! Good morning, ma'am!

BARTHWICK. About your husband—he's not in work, I hear?

MRS. JONES. No, sir; of course he's not in work just now.

BARTHWICK. Then I suppose he's earning nothing.

MRS. JONES. No, sir, he's not earning anything just now, sir.

BARTHWICK. And how many children have you?

MRS. JONES. Three children; but of course they don't eat very much, sir. [*A little silence.*]

BARTHWICK. And how old is the eldest?

MRS. JONES. Nine years old, sir.

BARTHWICK. Do they go to school?

MRS. JONES. Yes, sir, they all three go to school every day.

BARTHWICK. [*Severely*] And what about their food when you're out at work.

MRS. JONES. Well, sir, I have to give them their dinner to take with them. Of course I'm not always able to give them anything; sometimes I have to send them without; but my husband is very good about the children when he's in work. But when he's not in work of course he's a very difficult man.

BARTHWICK. He drinks, I suppose?

MRS. JONES. Yes, sir. Of course I can't say he doesn't drink, because he does.

BARTHWICK. And I suppose he takes all your money?

MRS. JONES. No, sir, he's very good about my money, except when he's not himself, and then, of course, he treats me very badly.

BARTHWICK. Now what is he—your husband?

MRS. JONES. By profession, sir, of course he's a groom.

BARTHWICK. A groom! How came he to lose his place?

MRS. JONES. He lost his place a long time ago, sir, and he's never had a very long job since; and now, of course, the motor-cars are against him.

BARTHWICK. When were you married to him, Mrs. Jones?

MRS. JONES. Eight years ago, sir—that was in——

MRS. BARTHWICK. [*Sharply*] Eight? You said the eldest child was nine.

MRS. JONES. Yes, ma'am; of course that was why he lost his place. He didn't treat me rightly, and of course his employer said he couldn't keep him because of the example.

BARTHWICK. You mean he—ahem——

MRS. JONES. Yes, sir; and of course after he lost his place he married me.

MRS. BARTHWICK. You actually mean to say you—you were——

BARTHWICK. My dear——

MRS. BARTHWICK. [*Indignantly*] How disgraceful!

BARTHWICK. [*Hurriedly*] And where are you living now, Mrs. Jones?

MRS. JONES. We've not got a home, sir. Of course we've been obliged to put away most of our things.

BARTHWICK. Put your things away! You mean to—to—er—to pawn them?

MRS. JONES. Yes, sir, to put them away. We're living in Merthyr Street—that is close by here, sir—at No. 34. We just have the one room.

BARTHWICK. And what do you pay a week?

MRS. JONES. We pay six shillings a week, sir, for a furnished room.

BARTHWICK. And I suppose you're behind in the rent?

MRS. JONES. Yes, sir, we're a little behind in the rent.

BARTHWICK. But *you're* in good work, aren't you?

MRS. JONES. Well, sir, I have a day in Stamford Place, Thursdays. And Mondays and Wednesdays and Fridays I come here. But to-day, of course, is a half-day, because of yesterday's Bank Holiday.

BARTHWICK. I see; four days a week, and you get half a crown a day, is that it?

MRS. JONES. Yes, sir, and my dinner; but sometimes it's only half a day, and that's eighteenpence.

BARTHWICK. And when your husband earns anything he spends it in drink, I suppose?

MRS. JONES. Sometimes he does, sir, and sometimes he gives it to me for the children. Of course he would work if he could get it, sir, but it seems there are a great many people out of work.

BARTHWICK. Ah! Yes. We—er—won't go into that. [*Sympathetically*] And how about your work here? Do you find it hard?

MRS. JONES. Oh! no, sir, not very hard, sir; except, of course, when I don't get my sleep at night.

BARTHWICK. Ah! And you help do all the rooms? And sometimes, I suppose, you go out for cook?

MRS. JONES. Yes, sir.

BARTHWICK. And you've been out this morning?

MRS. JONES. Yes, sir, of course I had to go to the green-grocer's.

BARTHWICK. Exactly. So your husband earns nothing? And he's a bad character.

MRS. JONES. No, sir, I don't say that, sir. I think there's a great deal of good in him; though he does treat me very bad sometimes. And of course I don't like to leave him, but I think I ought to, because really I hardly know how to stay with him. He often raises his hand to me. Not long ago he gave me a blow here [*touches her breast*] and I can feel it now. So I think I ought to leave him, don't *you*, sir?

BARTHWICK. Ah! I can't help you there. It's a very serious thing to leave your husband. Very serious thing.

MRS. JONES. Yes, sir, of course I'm afraid of what he might do to me if I were to leave him; he can be so very violent.

BARTHWICK. H'm! Well, that I can't pretend to say anything about. It's the bad principle I'm speaking of—

MRS. JONES. Yes, sir; I know nobody can help me. I know I must decide for myself, and of course I know that he has a very hard life. And he's fond of the children, and it's very hard for him to see them going without food.

BARTHWICK. [*Hastily*] Well—er—thank you, I just wanted to hear about you. I don't think I need detain you any longer, Mrs.—Jones.

MRS. JONES. No, sir, thank you, sir.

BARTHWICK. Good morning, then.

MRS. JONES. Good morning, sir; good morning, ma'am.

BARTHWICK. [*Exchanging glances with his wife*] By the way, Mrs. Jones—I think it is only fair to tell you, a silver cigarette-box—er—is missing.

MRS. JONES. [*Looking from one face to the other*] I am very sorry, sir.

BARTHWICK. Yes; you have not seen it, I suppose?

MRS. JONES. [*Realizing that suspicion is upon her; with an uneasy movement*] Where was it, sir; if you please, sir?

BARTHWICK. [*Evasively*] Where did Marlow say? Er—in this room, yes, in *this* room.

MRS. JONES. No, sir, I haven't seen it—of course if I'd seen it I should have noticed it.

BARTHWICK. [*Giving her a rapid glance*] You—you are sure of that?

MRS. JONES. [*Impassively*] Yes, sir. [*With a slow nodding of her head.*] I have not seen it, and of course I *don't* know where it is.

[*She turns and goes quietly out.*]

BARTHWICK. H'm!

[*The three BARTHWICKS avoid each other's glances.*]

The curtain falls.

ACT II

SCENE I

The JONES' lodgings, Merthyr Street, at half-past two o'clock. The bare room, with tattered oilcloth and damp, distempered walls, has an air of tidy wretchedness. On the bed lies JONES, half-dressed; his coat is thrown across his feet, and muddy boots are lying on the floor close by. He is asleep. The door is opened and MRS. JONES comes in, dressed in a pinched black jacket and old black sailor hat; she carries a parcel wrapped up in "The Times." She puts her parcel down, unwraps an apron, half a loaf, two onions, three potatoes, and a tiny piece of bacon. Taking a teapot from the cupboard, she rinses it, shakes into it some powdered tea out of a screw of paper, puts it on the hearth, and sitting in a wooden chair quietly begins to cry.

JONES. [*Stirring and yawning*] That you? What's the time?

MRS. JONES. [*Drying her eyes, and in her usual voice*] Half-past two.

JONES. What you back so soon for?

MRS. JONES. I only had the half-day to-day, Jem.

JONES. [*On his back, and in a drowsy voice*] Got anything for dinner?

MRS. JONES. Mrs. Barthwick's cook gave me a little bit of bacon. I'm going to make a stew. [*She prepares for cooking.*] There's fourteen shillings owing for rent, James, and of course I've only got two and fourpence. They'll be coming for it to-day.

JONES. [*Turning towards her on his elbow*] Let 'em come and find my surprise packet. I've had enough o' this tryin' for

work. Why should I go round and round after a job like a bloomin' squirrel in a cage. "Give us a job, sir"—"Take a man on"—"Got a wife and three children." Sick of it I am! I'd sooner lie here and rot. "Jones, you come and join the demonstration; come and 'old a flag, and listen to the ruddy orators, and go 'ome as empty as you came." There's some that seems to like *that*—the sheep! When I go seekin' for a job now, and sees the brutes lookin' me up an' down, it's like a thousand serpents in me. I'm not arskin' for any treat. A man wants to sweat hisself silly and not allowed—that's a rum start, ain't it? A man wants to sweat his soul out to keep the breath in him and ain't allowed—that's justice—that's freedom and all the rest of it. [*He turns his face towards the wall.*] You're so milky mild; you don't know what goes on inside o' me. I'm done with the silly game. If they want me, let 'em come for me!

[*MRS. JONES stops cooking and stands unmoving at the table.*] I've tried and done with it, I tell you. I've never been afraid of what's before *me*. You mark my words—if you think they've broke my spirit, you're mistook. I'll lie and rot sooner than arsk 'em again. What makes you stand like that—you long-sufferin', Gawd-forsaken image—that's why I can't keep my hands off you. So now you know. Work! You can work, but you haven't the spirit of a louse!

MRS. JONES. [*Quietly*] You talk more wild sometimes when you're yourself, James, than when you're not. If you don't get work, how are we to go on? They won't let us stay here; they're looking to their money to-day, I know.

JONES. I see this Barthwick o' yours every day goin' down to Pawlyment snug and comfortable to talk his silly soul out; an' I see that young calf, his son, swellin' it about, and goin' on the razzle-dazzle. Wot 'ave they done that makes 'em any better than wot I am? They never did a day's work in their lives. I see 'em day after day——

MRS. JONES. And I wish you wouldn't come after me like that, and hang about the house. You don't seem able to keep

away at all, and whatever you do it for I can't think, because of course they notice it.

JONES. I suppose I may go where I like. Where *may* I go? The other day I went to a place in the Edgeware Road. "Guv'nor," I says to the boss, "take me on," I says. "I 'aven't done a stroke o' work not these two months; it takes the heart out of a man," I says; "I'm one to work; I'm not afraid of anything you can give me!" "My good man," 'e says, "I've had thirty of you here this morning. I took the first two," he says, "and that's all I want." "Thank you, then rot the world!" I says. "Blaspheming," he says, "is not the way to get a job. Out you go, my lad!" [*He laughs sardonically.*] Don't you raise your voice because you're starvin'; don't yer even think of it; take it lyin' down! Take it like a sensible man, carn't you? And a little way down the street a lady says to me: [*Pinching his voice.*] "D'you want to earn a few pence, my man?" and gives me her dog to 'old outside a shop—fat as a butler 'e was—tons o' meat had gone to the makin' of *him*. It did 'er good, it did, made 'er feel 'erself that *charitable*, but I see 'er lookin' at the copper standin' alongside o' me, for fear I should make off with 'er bloomin' fat dog. [*He sits on the edge of the bed and puts a boot on. Then looking up.*] What's in that head o' yours? [*Almost pathetically.*] Carn't you speak for once?

[*There is a knock, and MRS. SEDDON, the landlady, appears, an anxious, harassed, shabby woman in working clothes.*]

MRS. SEDDON. I thought I 'card you come in, Mrs. Jones. I've spoke to my 'usband, but he says he really can't afford to wait another day.

JONES. [*With scowling jocularly*] Never you mind what your 'usband says, you go your own way like a proper independent woman. Here, Jenny, chuck her that.

[*Producing a sovereign from his trousers pocket, he throws it to his wife, who catches it in her apron with a gasp. JONES resumes the lacing of his boots.*]

MRS. JONES. [*Rubbing the sovereign stealthily*] I'm very

sorry we're so late with it, and of course it's fourteen shillings, so if you've got six that will be right.

[MRS. SEDDON *takes the sovereign and fumbles for the change.*

JONES. [*With his eyes fixed on his boots*] Bit of a surprise for yer, ain't it?

MRS. SEDDON. Thank you, and I'm sure I'm very much obliged. [*She does indeed appear surprised.*] I'll bring you the change.

JONES. [*Mockingly*] Don't mention it.

MRS. SEDDON. Thank you, and I'm sure I'm very much obliged. [*She slides away.*

[MRS. JONES *gazes at JONES, who is still lacing up his boots.*

JONES. I've had a bit of luck. [*Pulling out the crimson purse and some loose coins.*] Picked up a purse—seven pound and more.

MRS. JONES. Oh, James!

JONES. Oh, James! What about Oh, James! I picked it up I tell you. This is lost property, this is!

MRS. JONES. But isn't there a name in it, or something?

JONES. Name? No, there ain't no name. This don't belong to such as 'ave visitin' cards. This belongs to a perfect lidy. Tike an' smell it. [*He pitches her the purse, which she puts gently to her nose.*] Now, you tell me what I ought to have done. You tell me that. You can always tell me what I ought to ha' done, can't yer?

MRS. JONES. [*Laying down the purse*] I can't say what you ought to have done, James. Of course the money wasn't yours; you've taken somebody else's money.

JONES. Finding's keeping. I'll take it as wages for the time I've gone about the streets asking for what's my rights. I'll take it for what's *overdue*, d'ye hear? [*With strange triumph.*] I've got money in my pocket, my girl. [MRS. JONES *goes on again with the preparation of the meal, JONES looking at her furtively.*] Money in my pocket! And I'm not goin' to waste it. With this 'ere money I'm goin' to Canada. I'll let you have a pound. [*A silence.*] You've often talked

of leavin' me. You've often told me I treat you badly—well, I 'ope you'll be glad when I'm gone.

MRS. JONES. [*Impassively*] You *have* treated me very badly, James, and of course I can't prevent your going; but I can't tell whether I shall be glad when you're gone.

JONES. It'll change my luck. I've 'ad nothing but bad luck since I first took up with you. [*More softly.*] And you've 'ad no bloomin' picnic.

MRS. JONES. Of course it would have been better for us if we had never met. We weren't meant for each other. But you're set against me, that's what you are, and you *have* been for a long time. And you treat me so badly, James, going after that Rosie and all. You don't ever seem to think of the children that I've had to bring into the world, and of all the trouble I've had to keep them, and what'll become of them when you're gone.

JONES. [*Crossing the room gloomily*] If you think I want to leave the little beggars you're bloomin' well mistaken.

MRS. JONES. Of course I know you're fond of them.

JONES. [*Fingering the purse, half angrily*] Well, then, you stow it, old girl. The kids'll get along better with you than when I'm here. If I'd ha' known as much as I do now, I'd never ha' had one o' them. What's the use o' bringin' 'em into a state o' things like this? It's a crime, that's what it is; but you find it out too late; that's what's the matter with this 'ere world.

[*He puts the purse back in his pocket.*]

MRS. JONES. Of course it would have been better for them, poor little things; but they're your own children, and I wonder at you talkin' like that. I should miss them dreadfully if I was to lose them.

JONES. [*Sullenly*] An' you ain't the only one. If I make money out there— [*Looking up, he sees her shaking out his coat—in a changed voice*] Leave that coat alone!

[*The silver box drops from the pocket, scattering the cigarettes upon the bed. Taking up the box, she stares at it; he rushes at her and snatches the box away.*]

MRS. JONES. [*Cowering back against the bed*] Oh, Jem! oh, Jem!

JONES. [*Dropping the box on to the table*] You mind what you're sayin'! When I go out I'll take and chuck it in the water along with that there purse. I 'ad it when I was in liquor, and for what you do when you're in liquor you're not responsible—and that's Gawd's truth as you ought to know. I don't want the thing—I won't have it. I took it out o' spite. I'm no thief, I tell you; and don't you call me one, or it'll be the worse for you.

MRS. JONES. [*Twisting her apron strings*] It's Mr. Barthwick's! You've taken away my reputation. Oh, Jem, whatever made you?

JONES. What d'you mean?

MRS. JONES. It's been missed; they think it's me. Oh! whatever made you do it, Jem?

JONES. I tell you I was in liquor. I don't want it; what's the good of it to me? If I were to pawn it they'd only nab me. I'm no thief. I'm no worse than wot that young Barthwick is; he brought 'ome that purse that I picked up—a lady's purse—'ad it off 'er in a row, kept sayin' 'e'd scored 'er off. Well, I scored 'im off. Tight as an owl 'e was! And d'you think anything'll happen to him?

MRS. JONES. [*As though speaking to herself*] Oh, Jem! it's the bread out of our mouths!

JONES. Is it then? I'll make it hot for 'em yet. What about that purse? What about young Barthwick? [MRS. JONES comes forward to the table and tries to take the box; JONES prevents her.] What do you want with that? You drop it, I say!

MRS. JONES. I'll take it back and tell them all about it.

[*She attempts to wrest the box from him.*]

JONES. Ah, would yer?

[*He drops the box, and rushes on her with a snarl. She slips back past the bed. He follows; a chair is overturned. The door is opened; SNOW comes in, a detective in plain clothes and bowler*

hat, with clipped moustaches. JONES drops his arms, MRS. JONES stands by the window gasping; SNOW, advancing swiftly to the table, puts his hand on the silver box.

SNOW. Doin' a bit o' skylarkin'? Fancy this is what I'm after. J.B., the very same. [*He gets back to the door, scrutinizing the crest and cypher on the box. To MRS. JONES.*] I'm a police officer. Are you Mrs. Jones.

MRS. JONES. Yes, sir.

SNOW. My instructions are to take you on a charge of stealing this box from J. Barthwick, Esquire, M.P., of 6, Rockingham Gate. Anything you say may be used against you. Well, Missis?

MRS. JONES. [*In her quiet voice, still out of breath, her hand upon her breast*] Of course I did *not* take it, sir. I never have taken anything that didn't belong to me; and of course I know nothing about it.

SNOW. You were at the house this morning; you did the room in which the box was left; you were alone in the room. I find the box 'ere. You say you didn't take it?

MRS. JONES. Yes, sir, of course I say I did not take it, because I did *not*.

SNOW. Then how does the box come to be here?

MRS. JONES. I would rather not say anything about it.

SNOW. Is this your husband?

MRS. JONES. Yes, sir, this is my husband, sir.

SNOW. Do you wish to say anything before I take her? [*JONES remains silent, with his head bent down.*] Well then, Missis, I'll just trouble you to come along with me quietly.

MRS. JONES. [*Twisting her hands*] Of course I wouldn't say I hadn't taken it if I had—and I *didn't* take it, indeed I didn't. Of course I know appearances are against me, and I can't tell you what really happened. But my children are at school, and they'll be coming home—and I don't know what they'll do without me!

SNOW. Your 'usband'll see to them, don't you worry.

[*He takes the woman gently by the arm.*]

JONES. You drop it—she's all right! [*Sullenly.*] I took the thing myself.

SNOW. [*Eyeing him*] There, there, it does you credit. Come along, Missis.

JONES. [*Passionately*] Drop it, I say, you blooming teck. She's my wife; she's a respectable woman. Take her if you dare!

SNOW. Now, now. What's the good of this? Keep a civil tongue, and it'll be the better for all of us. [*He puts his whistle in his mouth and draws the woman to the door.*]

JONES. [*With a rush*] Drop her, and put up your 'ands, or I'll soon make yer. You leave her alone, will yer! Don't I tell yer, I took the thing myself!

SNOW. [*Blowing his whistle*] Drop your hands, or I'll take you too. Ah, would you?

[JONES, closing, deals him a blow. A Policeman in uniform appears; there is a short struggle, and JONES is overpowered. MRS. JONES raises her hands and drops her face on them.]

The curtain falls.

SCENE II

The BARTHWICKS' dining-room the same evening. The BARTHWICKS are seated at dessert.

MRS. BARTHWICK. John! [*A silence broken by the cracking of nuts.*] John!

BARTHWICK. I wish you'd speak about the nuts—they're uneatable. [*He puts one in his mouth.*]

MRS. BARTHWICK. It's not the season for them. I called on the Holyroods. [*BARTHWICK fills his glass with port.*]

JACK. Crackers, please, dad.

[BARTHWICK passes the crackers. His demeanour is reflective.]

MRS. BARTHWICK. Lady Holyrood has got very stout. I've noticed it coming for a long time.

BARTHWICK. [*Gloomily*] Stout? [*He takes up the crackers—with transparent airiness.*] The Holyroods had some trouble with their servants, hadn't they?

JACK. Crackers, please, dad.

BARTHWICK. [*Passing the crackers*] It got into the papers. The cook, wasn't it?

MRS. BARTHWICK. No, the lady's-maid. I was talking it over with Lady Holyrood. The girl used to have her young man to see her.

BARTHWICK. [*Uneasily*] I'm not sure they were wise——

MRS. BARTHWICK. My dear John, what are you talking about? How could there be any alternative? Think of the effect on the other servants!

BARTHWICK. Of course in principle—I wasn't thinking of that.

JACK. [*Maliciously*] Crackers, please, dad.

[*BARTHWICK is compelled to pass the crackers.*]

MRS. BARTHWICK. Lady Holyrood told me: "I had her up," she said; "I said to her, 'You'll leave my house at once; I think your conduct disgraceful. I can't tell, I don't know, and I don't wish to know, what you were doing. I send you away on principle; you need not come to me for a character.' And the girl said: 'If you don't give me my notice, my lady, I want a month's wages. I'm perfectly respectable. I've done nothing.'"—Done nothing!

BARTHWICK. H'm!

MRS. BARTHWICK. Servants have too much licence. They hang together so terribly you never can tell what they're really thinking; it's as if they were all in a conspiracy to keep you in the dark. Even with Marlow, you feel that he never lets you know what's really in his mind. I hate that secretiveness; it destroys all confidence. I feel sometimes I should like to shake him.

JACK. Marlow's a most decent chap. It's simply beastly every one knowing your affairs.

BARTHWICK. The less you say about that the better!

MRS. BARTHWICK. It goes all through the lower classes. You can *not* tell when they are speaking the truth. To-day when I was shopping after leaving the Holyroods, one of these unemployed came up and spoke to me. I suppose I only had twenty yards or so to walk to the carriage, but he seemed to spring up in the street.

BARTHWICK. Ah! You must be very careful whom you speak to in these days.

MRS. BARTHWICK. I didn't answer him, of course. But I could see at once that he wasn't telling the truth.

BARTHWICK. [*Cracking a nut*] There's one very good rule—look at their eyes.

JACK. Crackers, please, dad.

BARTHWICK. [*Passing the crackers*] If their eyes are straight-forward I sometimes give them sixpence. It's against my principles, but it's most difficult to refuse. If you see that they're desperate, and dull, and shifty-looking, as so many of them are, it's certain to mean drink, or crime, or something unsatisfactory.

MRS. BARTHWICK. This man had dreadful eyes. He looked as if he could commit a murder. "I've 'ad nothing to eat to-day," he said. Just like that.

BARTHWICK. What was William about? He ought to have been waiting.

JACK. [*Raising his wineglass to his nose*] Is this the '63, dad?

[BARTHWICK, *holding his wineglass to his eye, lowers it and passes it before his nose.*]

MRS. BARTHWICK. I hate people that can't speak the truth. [*Father and son exchange a look behind their port.*] It's just as easy to speak the truth as not. I've always found it easy enough. It makes it impossible to tell what is genuine; one feels as if one were continually being taken in.

BARTHWICK. [*Sententiously*] The lower classes are their own enemies. If they would only trust us, they would get on so much better.

MRS. BARTHWICK. But even then it's so often their own fault. Look at that Mrs. Jones this morning.

BARTHWICK. I only want to do what's right in that matter. I had occasion to see Roper this afternoon. I mentioned it to him. He's coming in this evening. It all depends on what the detective says. I've had my doubts. I've been thinking it over.

MRS. BARTHWICK. The woman impressed me most unfavourably. She seemed to have no shame. That affair she was talking about—she and the man when they were young, so immoral! And before you and Jack! I could have put her out of the room!

BARTHWICK. Oh! I don't want to excuse them, but in looking at these matters one must consider——

MRS. BARTHWICK. Perhaps you'll say the man's employer was wrong in dismissing him?

BARTHWICK. Of course not. It's not there that I feel doubt. What I ask myself is——

JACK. Port, please, dad.

BARTHWICK. [*Circulating the decanter in religious imitation of the rising and setting of the sun*] I ask myself whether we are sufficiently careful in making inquiries about people before we engage them, especially as regards moral conduct.

JACK. Pass the port, please, mother!

MRS. BARTHWICK. [*Passing it*] My dear boy, aren't you drinking too much? [JACK fills his glass.]

MARLOW. [*Entering*] Detective Snow to see you, sir.

BARTHWICK. [*Uneasily*] Ah! say I'll be with him in a minute.

MRS. BARTHWICK. [*Without turning*] Let him come in here, Marlow.

[SNOW enters in an overcoat, his bowler hat in hand.]

BARTHWICK. [*Half rising*] Oh! Good evening!

SNOW. Good evening, sir; good evening, ma'am. I've called round to report what I've done, rather late, I'm afraid—another case took me away. [*He takes the silver box out of his*

pocket, causing a sensation in the BARTHWICK family.] This is the identical article, I believe.

BARTHWICK. Certainly, certainly.

SNOW. Havin' your crest and cypher, as you described to me, sir, I'd no hesitation in the matter.

BARTHWICK. Excellent. Will you have a glass of—[*he glances at the waning port*—]—er—sherry? [*Pours out sherry.*] Jack, just give Mr. Snow this.

[*JACK rises and gives the glass to SNOW; then, lolling in his chair, regards him indolently.*]

SNOW. [*Drinking off wine and putting down the glass*] After seeing you I went round to this woman's lodgings, sir. It's a low neighbourhood, and I thought it as well to place a constable below—and not without 'e was wanted, as things turned out.

BARTHWICK. Indeed!

SNOW. Yes, sir, I 'ad some trouble. I asked her to account for the presence of the article. She could give me no answer, except to deny the theft; so I took her into custody; then her husband came for me, so I was obliged to take him, too, for assault. He was very violent on the way to the station—very violent—threatened you and your son, and altogether he was a handful, I can tell you.

MRS. BARTHWICK. What a ruffian he must be!

SNOW. Yes, ma'am, a rough customer.

JACK. [*Sipping his wine, bemused*] Punch the beggar's head.

SNOW. Given to drink, as I understand, sir.

MRS. BARTHWICK. It's to be hoped he will get a severe punishment.

SNOW. The odd thing is, sir, that he persists in sayin' he took the box himself.

BARTHWICK. Took the box himself! [*He smiles.*] What does he think to gain by that?

SNOW. He says the young gentleman was intoxicated last night—[*JACK stops the cracking of a nut, and looks at SNOW.* BARTHWICK, *losing his smile, has put his wineglass down; there is a silence*—SNOW, *looking from face to face, remarks*—]—took him

into the house and gave him whisky; and under the influence of an empty stomach the man says he took the box.

MRS. BARTHWICK. The impudent wretch!

BARTHWICK. D'you mean that he—er—intends to put this forward to-morrow——

SNOW. That'll be his line, sir; but whether he's endeavouring to shield his wife, or whether [*he looks at JACK*] there's something in it, will be for the magistrate to say.

MRS. BARTHWICK. [*Haughtily*] Something in what? I don't understand you. As if my son would bring a man like that into the house!

BARTHWICK. [*From the fireplace, with an effort to be calm*] My son can speak for himself, no doubt.—Well, Jack, what do you say?

MRS. BARTHWICK. [*Sharply*] What does he say? Why, of course, he says the whole story's stuff!

JACK. [*Embarrassed*] Well, of course, I—of course, I don't know anything about it.

MRS. BARTHWICK. I should think not, indeed! [*To SNOW.*] The man is an audacious ruffian!

BARTHWICK. [*Suppressing jumps*] But in view of my son's saying there's nothing in this—this fable—will it be necessary to proceed against the man under the circumstances?

SNOW. We shall have to charge him with the assault, sir. It would be as well for your son to come down to the Court. There'll be a remand, no doubt. The queer thing is there was quite a sum of money found on him, and a crimson silk purse. [*BARTHWICK starts; JACK rises and sits down again.*] I suppose the lady hasn't missed her purse?

BARTHWICK. [*Hastily*] Oh, no! Oh, no!

JACK. No!

MRS. BARTHWICK. [*Dreamily*] No! [*To SNOW.*] I've been inquiring of the servants. This man *does* hang about the house. I shall feel much safer if he gets a good long sentence; I do think we ought to be protected against such ruffians.

BARTHWICK. Yes, yes, of course, on principle—but in this

case we have a number of things to think of. [*To SNOW.*] I suppose, as you say, the man *must* be charged, eh?

SNOW. No question about that, sir.

BARTHWICK. [*Staring gloomily at JACK*] This prosecution goes very much against the grain with me. I have great sympathy with the poor. In my position I'm bound to recognize the distress there is amongst them. The condition of the people leaves much to be desired. D'you follow me? I wish I could see my way to drop it.

MRS. BARTHWICK. [*Sharply*] John! it's simply not fair to other people. It's putting property at the mercy of anyone who likes to take it.

BARTHWICK. [*Trying to make signs to her aside*] I'm not defending him, not at all. I'm trying to look at the matter broadly.

MRS. BARTHWICK. Nonsense, John, there's a time for everything.

SNOW. [*Rather sardonically*] I might point out, sir, that to withdraw the charge of stealing would not make much difference, because the facts must come out [*he looks significantly at JACK*] in reference to the assault; and, as I said, that charge will have to go forward.

BARTHWICK. [*Hastily*] Yes, oh! exactly! It's entirely on the woman's account—entirely a matter of my own private feelings.

SNOW. If I were you, sir, I should let things take their course. It's not likely there'll be much difficulty. These things are very quick settled.

BARTHWICK. [*Doubtfully*] You think so—you think so?

JACK. [*Rousing himself*] I say, what shall I have to swear to?

SNOW. That's best known to yourself, sir. [*Retreating to the door.*] Better employ a solicitor, sir, in case anything should arise. We shall have the butler to prove the loss of the article. You'll excuse me going, I'm rather pressed to-night. The case may come on any time after eleven. Good evening, sir; good

evening, ma'am. I shall have to produce the box in court tomorrow, so if you'll excuse me, sir, I may as well take it with me.

[*He takes the silver box and leaves them with a little bow.*]

[BARTHWICK makes a move to follow him, then dashing his hands beneath his coat tails, speaks with desperation.]

BARTHWICK. I do wish you'd leave me to manage things myself. You *will* put your nose into matters you know nothing of. A pretty mess you've made of this!

MRS. BARTHWICK. [*Coldly*] I don't in the least know what you're talking about. If you can't stand up for your rights, I can. I've no patience with your principles, it's such nonsense.

BARTHWICK. Principles! Good Heavens! What have principles to do with it, for goodness' sake? Don't you know that Jack was drunk last night!

JACK. Dad!

MRS. BARTHWICK. [*In horror rising*] Jack!

JACK. Look here, mother—I had supper. Everybody does. I mean to say—you know what I mean—it's absurd to call it being drunk. At Oxford everybody gets a bit "on" sometimes——

MRS. BARTHWICK. Well I think it's most dreadful! If that is really what you do at Oxford——

JACK. [*Angrily*] Well, why did you send me there? One must do as other fellows do. It's such nonsense, I mean, to call it being drunk. Of course I'm awfully sorry. I've had such a beastly headache all day.

BARTHWICK. Tcha! If you'd only had the common decency to remember what happened when you came in. Then we should know what truth there was in what this fellow says—as it is, it's all the most confounded darkness.

JACK. [*Staring as though at half-formed visions*] I just get a—and then—it's gone——

MRS. BARTHWICK. Oh, Jack! do you mean to say you were so tipsy you can't even remember——

JACK. Look here, mother! Of course I remember I came—I must have come——

BARTHWICK. [*Unguardedly, and walking up and down*] Tcha!—and that infernal purse! Good Heavens! It'll get into the papers. Who on earth could have foreseen a thing like this? Better to have lost a dozen cigarette-boxes, and said nothing about it. [*To his wife.*] It's all your doing. I told you so from the first. I wish to goodness Roper would come!

MRS. BARTHWICK. [*Sharply*] I don't know what you're talking about, John.

BARTHWICK. [*Turning on her*] No, you—you—you don't know anything! [*Sharply.*] Where the devil is Roper? If he can see a way out of this he's a better man than I take him for. I defy *anyone* to see a way out of it. I can't.

JACK. Look here, don't excite, dad—I can simply say I was too beastly tired, and don't remember anything except that I came in and [*in a dying voice*] went to bed the same as usual.

BARTHWICK. Went to bed? Who knows where you went?—I've lost all confidence. For all I know you slept on the floor.

JACK. [*Indignantly*] I didn't, I slept on the——

BARTHWICK. [*Sitting on the sofa*] Who cares where you slept; what does it matter if he mentions the—the—a perfect disgrace?

MRS. BARTHWICK. *What?* [*A silence.*] I *insist* on knowing.

JACK. Oh! nothing——

MRS. BARTHWICK. Nothing? What do you mean by nothing, Jack? There's your father in such a state about it——

JACK. It's only my purse.

MRS. BARTHWICK. Your purse. You know perfectly well you haven't got one.

JACK. Well, it was somebody else's—It was all a joke—I didn't want the beastly thing——

MRS. BARTHWICK. Do you mean that you had another person's purse, and that this man took it too?

BARTHWICK. Tcha! Of course he took it too! A man

like that Jones will make the most of it. It'll get into the papers.

MRS. BARTHWICK. I don't understand. What on earth is all the fuss about? [*Bending over JACK, and softly.*] Jack, now tell me, dear! Don't be afraid. What is it? Come!

JACK. Oh, don't, mother!

MRS. BARTHWICK. But don't what, dear?

JACK. It was pure sport. I don't know how I got the thing. Of course I'd had a bit of a row—I didn't know what I was doing—I was—I was—well, you know—I suppose I must have pulled the bag out of her hand.

MRS. BARTHWICK. Out of her hand? Whose hand? What bag—whose bag?

JACK. Oh! I don't know—*her* bag—it belonged to—[*in a desperate and rising voice*] a woman.

MRS. BARTHWICK. A woman? Oh! Jack! No!

JACK. [*Jumping up*] You *would* have it. I didn't want to tell you. It's not my fault.

[*The door opens and MARLOW ushers in a man of middle age, inclined to corpulence, in evening dress. He has a ruddy, thin moustache, and dark, quick-moving little eyes. His eyebrows are Chinese.*

MARLOW. Mr. Roper, sir. [*He leaves the room.*

ROPER. [*With a quick look round*] How do you do?

[*But neither JACK nor MRS. BARTHWICK make a sign.*

BARTHWICK. [*Hurrying*] Thank goodness you've come, Roper. You remember what I told you this afternoon; we've just had the detective here.

ROPER. Got the box?

BARTHWICK. Yes, yes, but look here—it wasn't the charwoman at all; her drunken loafer of a husband took the things—he says that fellow there [*he waves his hand at JACK, who with his shoulder raised, seems trying to ward off a blow*] let him into the house last night. Can you imagine such a thing?

[*Roper laughs.*

BARTHWICK. [*With excited emphasis*] It's no laughing

matter, Roper. I told you about that business of Jack's too—don't you see—the brute took both the things—took that infernal purse. It'll get into the papers.

ROPER. [*Raising his eyebrows*] H'm! The purse! Depravity in high life! What does your son say?

BARTHWICK. He remembers nothing. D——n! Did you ever see such a mess? It'll get into the papers.

MRS. BARTHWICK. [*With her hand across her eyes*] No! it's not that—— [*BARTHWICK and ROPER turn and look at her.*

BARTHWICK. It's the idea of that woman—she's just heard—— [*ROPER nods. And MRS. BARTHWICK, setting her lips, gives a slow look at JACK, and sits down at the table*]. What on earth's to be done, Roper? A ruffian like this Jones will make all the capital he can out of that purse.

MRS. BARTHWICK. I don't believe that Jack took that purse.

BARTHWICK. What—when the woman came here for it this morning?

MRS. BARTHWICK. Here? She had the impudence? Why wasn't I told? [*She looks round from face to face—no one answers her, there is a pause.*

BARTHWICK. [*Suddenly*] What's to be done, Roper?

ROPER. [*Quietly to JACK*] I suppose you didn't leave your latchkey in the door?

JACK. [*Sullenly*] Yes, I did.

BARTHWICK. Good heavens! What next?

MRS. BARTHWICK. I'm certain you never let that man into the house, Jack, it's a wild invention. I'm sure there's not a word of truth in it, Mr. Roper.

ROPER. [*Very suddenly*] Where did you sleep last night?

JACK. [*Promptly*] On the sofa, there—[*hesitating*] that is—I——

BARTHWICK. On the sofa? D'you mean to say you didn't go to bed?

JACK. [*Sullenly*] No.

BARTHWICK. If you don't remember anything, how can you remember that?

JACK. Because I woke up there in the morning.

MRS. BARTHWICK. Oh, Jack!

BARTHWICK. Good gracious!

JACK. And Mrs. Jones saw me. I wish you wouldn't bait me so.

ROPER. Do you remember giving anyone a drink?

JACK. By Jove, I do seem to remember a fellow with—a fellow with—— [*He looks at Roper*] I say, d'you want me——?

ROPER. [*Quick as lightning*] With a dirty face?

JACK. [*With illumination*] I do—I distinctly remember his——

[*BARTHWICK moves abruptly; MRS. BARTHWICK looks at ROPER angrily, and touches her son's arm.*]

MRS. BARTHWICK. You don't remember, it's ridiculous! I don't believe the man was ever here at all.

BARTHWICK. You must speak the truth, if it *is* the truth. But if you *do* remember such a dirty business, I shall wash my hands of you altogether.

JACK. [*Glaring at them*] Well, what the devil——

MRS. BARTHWICK. Jack!

JACK. Well, mother, I—I don't know what you *do* want.

MRS. BARTHWICK. We want you to speak the truth and say you never let this low man into the house.

BARTHWICK. Of course if you think that you really gave this man whisky in that disgraceful way, and let him see what you'd been doing, and were in such a disgusting condition that you don't remember a word of it——

ROPER. [*Quick*] I've no memory myself—never had.

BARTHWICK. [*Desperately*] I don't know what you're to say.

ROPER. [*To JACK*] Say nothing at all! Don't put yourself in a false position. The man stole the things or the woman stole the things, you had nothing to do with it. You were asleep on the sofa.

MRS. BARTHWICK. Your leaving the latchkey in the door was quite bad enough, there's no need to mention anything

else. [*Touching his forehead softly.*] My dear, how hot your head is!

JACK. But I want to know what I'm to do. [*Passionately.*] I won't be badgered like this.

[*MRS. BARTHWICK recoils from him.*]

ROPER. [*Very quickly*] You forgot all about it. You were asleep.

JACK. Must I go down to the Court to-morrow?

ROPER. [*Shaking his head*] No.

BARTHWICK. [*In a relieved voice*] Is that so?

ROPER. Yes.

BARTHWICK. But *you'll* go, Roper.

ROPER. Yes.

JACK. [*With wan cheerfulness*] Thanks, awfully! So long as I don't have to go. [*Putting his hand up to his head.*] I think if you'll excuse me—I've had a most beastly day.

[*He looks from his father to his mother.*]

MRS. BARTHWICK. [*Turning quickly*] Good night, my boy.

JACK. Good-night, mother. [*He goes out.* MRS. BARTHWICK *heaves a sigh.* *There is a silence.*]

BARTHWICK. He gets off too easily. But for my money that woman would have prosecuted him.

ROPER. You find money useful.

BARTHWICK. I've my doubts whether we ought to hide the truth——

ROPER. There'll be a remand.

BARTHWICK. What! D'you mean he'll have to *appear* on the remand?

ROPER. Yes.

BARTHWICK. H'm, I thought you'd be able to—— Look here, Roper, you *must* keep that purse out of the papers.

[*ROPER fixes his little eyes on him and nods.*]

MRS. BARTHWICK. Mr. Roper, don't you think the magistrate ought to be told what sort of people these Joneses are; I mean about their immorality before they were married. I don't know if John told you.

ROPER. Afraid it's not material.

MRS. BARTHWICK. Not material?

ROPER. Purely private life! May have happened to the magistrate.

BARTHWICK. [*With a movement as if to shift a burden*] Then you'll take the thing into your hands?

ROPER. If the gods are kind. [*He holds his hand out.*]

BARTHWICK. [*Shaking it dubiously*] Kind—eh? What? You going?

ROPER. Yes. I've another case, something like yours—most unexpected.

[*He bows to MRS. BARTHWICK and goes out, followed by BARTHWICK, talking to the last. MRS. BARTHWICK at the table bursts into smothered sobs. BARTHWICK returns.*]

BARTHWICK. [*To himself*] There'll be a scandal.

MRS. BARTHWICK. [*Disguising her grief at once*] I simply can't imagine what Roper means by making a joke of a thing like that!

BARTHWICK. [*Staring strangely*] You! You can't imagine anything! You've no more imagination than a fly!

MRS. BARTHWICK. [*Angrily*] You dare to tell me that I have no imagination.

BARTHWICK. [*Flustered*] I—I'm upset. From beginning to end, the whole thing has been utterly against my principles.

MRS. BARTHWICK. Rubbish! You haven't any! Your principles are nothing in the world but sheer—fright!

BARTHWICK. [*Walking to the window*] I've never been frightened in my life. You heard what Roper said. It's enough to upset anyone when a thing like this happens. Everything one says and does seems to turn in one's mouth—it's—it's uncanny. It's not the sort of thing I've been accustomed to. [*As though stifling, he throws the window open. The faint sobbing of a child comes in.*] What's that? [*They listen.*]

MRS. BARTHWICK. [*Sharply*] I can't stand that crying. I must send Marlow to stop it. My nerves are all on edge. [*She rings the bell.*]

BARTHWICK. I'll shut the window; you'll hear nothing.
[*He shuts the window. There is silence.*]

MRS. BARTHWICK. [*Sharply*] That's no good! It's on my nerves. Nothing upsets me like a child's crying. [MARLOW comes in.] What's that noise of crying, Marlow? It sounds like a child.

BARTHWICK. It is a child. I can see it against the railings.

MARLOW. [*Opening the window, and looking out—quietly*] It's Mrs. Jones's little boy, ma'am; he came here after his mother.

MRS. BARTHWICK. [*Moving quickly to the window*] Poor little chap! John, we oughtn't to go on with this!

BARTHWICK. [*Sitting heavily in a chair*] Ah! but it's out of our hands!

[MRS BARTHWICK turns her back to the window. There is an expression of distress on her face. She stands motionless, compressing her lips. The crying begins again. BARTHWICK covers his ears with his hands, and MARLOW shuts the window. The crying ceases.]

The curtain falls.

ACT III

Eight days have passed, and the scene is a London Police Court at one o'clock. A canopied seat of Justice is surmounted by the lion and unicorn. Before the fire a worn-looking MAGISTRATE is warming his coat-tails, and staring at two little girls in faded blue and orange rags, who are placed before the dock. Close to the witness-box is a RELIEVING OFFICER in an overcoat, and a short brown beard. Beside the little girl stands a bald POLICE CONSTABLE. On the front bench are sitting BARTHWICK and ROPER, and behind them JACK. In the railed enclosure are seedy-looking men and women. Some prosperous constables sit or stand about.

MAGISTRATE. [*In his paternal and ferocious voice, hissing his s's*] Now let us dispose of these young ladies.

USHER. Theresa Livens, Maud Livens. [*The bald CONSTABLE indicates the little girls, who remain silent, disilluminated, inattentive.*] Relieving Officer! [*The RELIEVING OFFICER steps into the witness-box.*

USHER. The evidence you give to the Court shall be the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help you God! Kiss the book! [*The book is kissed.*

RELIEVING OFFICER. [*In a monotone, pausing slightly at each sentence end, that his evidence may be inscribed*] About ten o'clock this morning, your Worship, I found these two little girls in Blue Street, Pulham, crying outside a public-house. Asked where their home was, they said they had no home. Mother had gone away. Asked about their father. Their father had no work. Asked where they slept last night. At their aunt's. I've made inquiries, your Worship. The wife has broken up the home and gone on the streets. The husband is out of work

and living in common lodging-houses. The husband's sister has eight children of her own, and says she can't afford to keep these little girls any longer.

MAGISTRATE. [*Returning to his seat beneath the canopy of Justice*] Now, let me see. You say the mother is on the streets; what evidence have you of that?

RELIEVING OFFICER. I have the husband here, your Worship.

MAGISTRATE. Very well; then let us see him. [*There are cries of "LIVENS."* The MAGISTRATE *leans forward, and stares with hard compassion at the little girls. LIVENS comes in. He is quiet, with grizzled hair, and a muffler for a collar. He stands beside the witness-box.*] And you are their father? Now, why don't you keep your little girls at home? How is it you leave them to wander about the streets like this?

LIVENS. I've got no home, your Worship. I'm living from 'and to mouth. I've got no work; and nothin' to keep them on.

MAGISTRATE. How is that?

LIVENS. [*Ashamedly*] My wife, she broke my 'ome up, and pawned the things.

MAGISTRATE. But what made you let her?

LIVENS. Your Worship, I'd no chance to stop 'er; she did it when I was out lookin' for work.

MAGISTRATE. Did you ill-treat her?

LIVENS. [*Emphatically*] I never raised my 'and to her in my life, your Worship.

MAGISTRATE. Then what was it—did she drink?

LIVENS. Yes, your Worship.

MAGISTRATE. Was she loose in her behaviour?

LIVENS. [*In a low voice*] Yes, your Worship.

MAGISTRATE. And where is she now?

LIVENS. I don't know, your Worship. She went off with a man, and after that I——

MAGISTRATE. Yes, yes. Who knows anything of her? [*To the bald CONSTABLE*] Is she known here?

RELIEVING OFFICER. Not in this district, your Worship; but I have ascertained that she is well known——

MAGISTRATE. Yes—yes; we'll stop at that. Now [*to the Father*] you say that she has broken up your home, and left these little girls. What provision can you make for them? You look a strong man.

LIVENS. So I am, your Worship. I'm willin' enough to work, but for the life of me I can't get anything to do.

MAGISTRATE. But have you tried?

LIVENS. I've tried everything, your Worship—I've tried my 'ardest.

MAGISTRATE. Well, well—— [*There is a silence.*]

RELIEVING OFFICER. If your Worship thinks it's a case, my people are willing to take them.

MAGISTRATE. Yes, yes, I know; but I've no evidence that this man is not the proper guardian for his children.

[*He rises and goes back to the fire.*]

RELIEVING OFFICER. The mother, your Worship, is able to get access to them.

MAGISTRATE. Yes, yes; the mother, of course, is an improper person to have anything to do with them. [*To the Father*] Well, now what do you say?

LIVENS. Your Worship, I can only say that if I could get work I should be only too willing to provide for them. But what can I do, your Worship? Here I am, obliged to live from 'and to mouth in these 'ere common lodging-houses. I'm a strong man—I'm willing to work—I'm half as alive again as some of 'em—but you see, your Worship, my 'air's turned a bit, owing to the fever—[*Touches his hair.*—]—and that's against me; and I don't seem to get a chance anyhow.

MAGISTRATE. Yes—yes. [*Slowly.*] Well, I think it's a case. [*Staring his hardest at the little girls.*] Now are you willing that these little girls should be sent to a home?

LIVENS. Yes, your Worship, I should be very willing.

MAGISTRATE. Well, I'll remand them for a week. Bring

them again to-day week; if I see no reason against it then, I'll make an order.

RELIEVING OFFICER. To-day week, your Worship.

[*The bald CONSTABLE takes the little girls out by the shoulders. The father follows them. The MAGISTRATE, returning to his seat, bends over and talks to his CLERK inaudibly.*]

BARTHWICK. [*Speaking behind his hand*] A painful case, Roper; very distressing state of things.

ROPER. Hundreds like this in the police courts.

BARTHWICK. Most distressing! The more I see of it, the more important this question of the condition of the people seems to become. I shall certainly make a point of taking up the cudgels in the House. I shall move——

[*The MAGISTRATE ceases talking to his CLERK.*]

CLERK. Remands.

[*BARTHWICK stops abruptly. There is a stir and MRS. JONES comes in by the public door; JONES, ushered by policemen, comes from the prisoner's door. They file into the dock.*]

CLERK. James Jones, Jane Jones.

USHER. Jane Jones.

BARTHWICK. [*In a whisper*] The purse—the purse *must* be kept out of it, Roper. Whatever happens you must keep that out of the papers.

[*ROPER nods.*]

BALD CONSTABLE. Hush!

[*MRS. JONES, dressed in her thin, black, wispy dress, and black straw hat, stands motionless with hands crossed on the front rail of the dock. JONES leans against the back rail of the dock, and keeps half turning, glancing defiantly about him. He is haggard and unshaven.*]

CLERK. [*Consulting with his papers*] This is the case remanded from last Wednesday, sir. Theft of a silver cigarette-box and assault on the police; the two charges were taken together. Jane Jones! James Jones!

MAGISTRATE. [*Staring*] Yes, yes; I remember.

CLERK. Jane Jones.

MRS. JONES. Yes, sir.

CLERK. Do you admit stealing a silver cigarette-box valued at five pounds, ten shillings, from the house of John Barthwick, M.P., between the hours of 11 P.M. on Easter Monday and 8.45 A.M. on Easter Tuesday last? Yes or no?

MRS. JONES. [*In a low voice*] No, sir, I do not, sir.

CLERK. James Jones? Do you admit stealing a silver cigarette-box valued at five pounds, ten shillings, from the house of John Barthwick, M.P., between the hours of 11 P.M. on Easter Monday and 8.45 A.M. on Easter Tuesday last? And further making an assault on the police when in the execution of their duty at 3 P.M. on Easter Tuesday? Yes or no?

JONES. [*Sullenly*] Yes, but I've a lot to say about it.

MAGISTRATE. [*To the CLERK*] Yes—yes. But how comes it that these two people are charged with the same offence? Are they husband and wife?

CLERK. Yes, sir. You remember you ordered a remand for further evidence as to the story of the male prisoner.

MAGISTRATE. Have they been in custody since?

CLERK. You released the woman on her own recognizances, sir.

MAGISTRATE. Yes, yes, this is the case of the silver box; I remember now. Well?

CLERK. Thomas Marlow.

[*The cry of "THOMAS MARLOW" is repeated. MARLOW comes in, and steps into the witness-box, and is sworn. The silver box is handed up, and placed on the rail.*]

CLERK. [*Reading from his papers*] Your name is Thomas Marlow? Are you butler to John Barthwick, M.P., of 6, Rockingham Gate?

MARLOW. Yes, sir.

CLERK. Did you between 10.45 and 11 o'clock on the night of Easter Monday last place a silver cigarette-box on a tray on the dining-room table at 6, Rockingham Gate? Is that the box?

MARLOW. Yes, sir.

CLERK. And did you miss the same at 8.45 on the following morning, on going to remove the tray?

MARLOW. Yes, sir.

CLERK. Is the female prisoner known to you?

[MARLOW nods.

Is she the charwoman employed at 6, Rockingham Gate?

[Again MARLOW nods.

Did you at the time of your missing the box find her in the room alone?

MARLOW. Yes, sir.

CLERK. Did you afterwards communicate the loss to your employer, and did he send you to the police station?

MARLOW. Yes, sir.

CLERK. [To MRS. JONES] Have you anything to ask him?

MRS. JONES. No, sir, nothing, thank you, sir.

CLERK. [To JONES] James Jones, have you anything to ask this witness?

JONES. I don't know 'im.

MAGISTRATE. Are you sure you put the box in the place you say at the time you say?

MARLOW. Yes, your Worship.

MAGISTRATE. Very well; then now let us have the officer.

[MARLOW leaves the box, and SNOW goes into it.

USHER. The evidence you give to the court shall be the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help you God.

[The book is kissed.

CLERK. [Reading from his papers] Your name is Robert Snow? You are a detective in the X. B. division of the Metropolitan police force? According to instructions received, did you on Easter Tuesday last proceed to the prisoners' lodgings at 34, Merthyr Street, St. Soames'? And did you on entering see the box produced, lying on the table?

SNOW. Yes, sir.

CLERK. Is that the box?

SNOW. [Fingering the box] Yes, sir.

CLERK. And did you thereupon take possession of it, and charge the female prisoner with theft of the box from 6, Rockingham Gate? And did she deny the same?

SNOW. Yes, sir.

CLERK. Did you take her into custody?

SNOW. Yes, sir.

MAGISTRATE. What was her behaviour?

SNOW. Perfectly quiet, your Worship. She persisted in the denial. That's all.

MAGISTRATE. Do you know her?

SNOW. No, your Worship.

MAGISTRATE. Is she known here?

BALD CONSTABLE. No, your Worship, they're neither of them known, we've nothing against them at all.

CLERK. [*To Mrs. Jones*] Have you anything to ask the officer?

Mrs. JONES. No, sir, thank you, I've nothing to ask him.

MAGISTRATE. Very well then—go on.

CLERK. [*Reading from his papers*] And while you were taking the female prisoner did the male prisoner interpose, and endeavour to hinder you in the execution of your duty, and did he strike you a blow?

SNOW. Yes, sir.

CLERK. And did he say, "You let her go, I took the box myself?"

SNOW. He did.

CLERK. And did you blow your whistle and obtain the assistance of another constable, and take him into custody?

SNOW. I did.

CLERK. Was he violent on the way to the station, and did he use bad language, and did he several times repeat that he had taken the box himself? [SNOW *nods*.

Did you thereupon ask him in what manner he had stolen the box? And did you understand him to say that he had entered the house at the invitation of young Mr. Barthwick [BARTHWICK, *turning in his seat, frowns at ROPER*] after mid-

night on Easter Monday, and partaken of whisky, and that under the influence of the whisky he had taken the box?

SNOW. I did, sir.

CLERK. And was his demeanour throughout very violent?

SNOW. It *was* very violent.

JONES. [*Breaking in*] Violent—of course it was. You put your 'ands on my wife when I kept tellin' you I took the thing myself.

MAGISTRATE. [*Hissing, with protruded neck*] Now—you will have your chance of saying what you want to say presently. Have you anything to ask the officer?

JONES. [*Sullenly*] No.

MAGISTRATE. Very well then. Now let us hear what the female prisoner has to say first.

MRS. JONES. Well, your Worship, of course I can only say what I've said all along, that I didn't take the box.

MAGISTRATE. Yes, but did you know that it was taken?

MRS. JONES. No, your Worship. And, of course, as to what my husband says, your Worship, I can't speak of my own knowledge. Of course, I know that he came home very late on the Monday night. It was past one o'clock when he came in, and he was not himself at all.

MAGISTRATE. Had he been drinking?

MRS. JONES. Yes, your Worship.

MAGISTRATE. And was he drunk?

MRS. JONES. Yes, your Worship, he was almost quite drunk.

MAGISTRATE. And did he say anything to you?

MRS. JONES. No, your Worship, only to call me names. And of course in the morning when I got up and went to work he was asleep. And I don't know anything more about it until I came home again. Except that Mr. Barthwick—that's my employer, your Worship—told me the box was missing.

MAGISTRATE. Yes, yes.

MRS. JONES. But of course when I was shaking out my husband's coat the cigarette-box fell out and all the cigarettes were scattered on the bed.

MAGISTRATE. You say all the cigarettes were scattered on the bed? [*To SNOW*] Did you see the cigarettes scattered on the bed?

SNOW. No, your Worship, I did not.

MAGISTRATE. You see he says he didn't see them.

JONES. Well, they were there for all that.

SNOW. I can't say, your Worship, that I had the opportunity of going round the room; I had all my work cut out with the male prisoner.

MAGISTRATE. [*To MRS. JONES*] Well, what more have you to say?

MRS. JONES. Of course when I saw the box, your Worship, I was dreadfully upset, and I couldn't think why he had done such a thing; when the officer came we were having words about it, because it is ruin to me, your Worship, in my profession, and I have three little children dependent on me.

MAGISTRATE. [*Protruding his neck*] Yes—yes—but what did he say to you?

MRS. JONES. I asked him whatever came over him to do such a thing—and he said it was the drink. He said that he had had too much to drink, and something came over him. And of course, your Worship, he had had very little to eat all day, and the drink does go to the head when you have not had enough to eat. Your Worship may not know, but it is the truth. And I would like to say that all through his married life I have never known him to do such a thing before, though we have passed through great hardships, and [*speaking with soft emphasis*] I am quite sure he would not have done it if he had been himself at the time.

MAGISTRATE. Yes, yes. But don't you know that that is no excuse?

MRS. JONES. Yes, your Worship. I know that it is no excuse.

[*The MAGISTRATE leans over and parleys with his CLERK.*]

JACK. [*Leaning over from his seat behind*] I say, dad——

BARTHWICK. Tsst! [*Sheltering his mouth, he speaks to*

ROPER.] Roper, you had better get up now and say that considering the circumstances and the poverty of the prisoners, we have no wish to proceed any further, and if the magistrate would deal with the case as one of disorder only on the part of——

BALD CONSTABLE. Hssshh! [ROPER shakes his head.

MAGISTRATE. Now, supposing what you say and what your husband says is true, what I have to consider is—how did he obtain access to this house, and were you in any way a party to his obtaining access? You are the charwoman employed at the house?

MRS. JONES. Yes, your Worship, and of course if I had let him into the house it would have been very wrong of me; and I have never done such a thing in any of the houses where I have been employed.

MAGISTRATE. Well—so you say. Now let us hear what story the male prisoner makes of it.

JONES. [*Who leans with his arms on the dock behind, speaks in a slow, sullen voice*] Wot I say is wot my wife says. I've never been 'ad up in a police court before, an' I can prove I took it when in liquor. I told her, an' she can tell you the same, that I was goin' to throw the thing into the water sooner than 'ave it on my mind.

MAGISTRATE. But how did you get into the house?

JONES. I was passin'. I was goin' 'ome from the "Goat and Bells."

MAGISTRATE. The "Goat and Bells,"—what is that? A public-house?

JONES. Yes, at the corner. It was Bank 'oliday, an' I'd 'ad a drop to drink. I sec this young Mr. Barthwick tryin' to find the keyhole on the wrong side of the door.

MAGISTRATE. Well?

JONES. [*Slowly and with many pauses*] Well—I 'elped 'im to find it—drunk as a lord 'e was. He goes on, an' comes back again, and says, I've got nothin' for you, 'e says, but come in an' 'ave a drink. So I went in just as you might 'ave done yourself. We 'ad a drink o' whisky just as you might have 'ad, 'nd young

Mr. Brathwick says to me, "Take a drink 'nd a smoke. Take anything you like," 'e says. And then he went to sleep on the sofa. I 'ad some more whisky—an' I 'ad a smoke—and I 'ad some more whisky—an' I carn't tell yer what 'appened after that.

MAGISTRATE. Do you mean to say you were so drunk that you can remember nothing?

JACK. [*Softly to his father*] I say, that's exactly what——

BARTHWICK. Tssh!

JONES. That's what I do mean.

MAGISTRATE. And yet you say you stole the box?

JONES. I never stole the box. I took it.

MAGISTRATE. [*Hissing, with protruded neck*] You did not steal it—you took it. Did it belong to you—what is that but stealing?

JONES. I took it.

MAGISTRATE. You took it—you took it away from their house and you took it to your house——

JONES. [*Sullenly breaking in*] I ain't got a house.

MAGISTRATE. Very well, let us hear what this young man Mr.—Mr. Barthwick—has to say to your story.

[*SNOW leaves the witness-box. The BALD CONSTABLE beckons JACK, who, clutching his hat, goes into the witness-box. ROPER moves to the table set apart for his profession.*]

SWEARING CLERK. The evidence you give to the Court shall be the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help you God. Kiss the book. [*The book is kissed.*]

ROPER. [*Examining*] What is your name?

JACK. [*In a low voice*] John Barthwick, Junior.

[*The CLERK writes it down.*]

ROPER. Where do you live?

JACK. At 6, Rockingham Gate.

[*All his answers are recorded by the CLERK.*]

ROPER. You are the son of the owner?

JACK. [*In a very low voice*] Yes.

ROPER. Speak up, please. Do you know the prisoners?

JACK. [*Looking at the JONESES, in a low voice*] I've seen Mrs. Jones. I—[*in a loud voice*] don't know the man.

JONES. Well, I know you!

BALD CONSTABLE. Hssh!

ROPER. Now, did you come in late on the night of Easter Monday?

JACK. Yes.

ROPER. And did you by mistake leave your latchkey in the door?

JACK. Yes.

MAGISTRATE. Oh! You left your latchkey in the door?

ROPER. And is that all you can remember about your coming in?

JACK. [*In a loud voice*] Yes, it is.

MAGISTRATE. Now, you have heard the male prisoner's story, what do you say to that?

JACK. [*Turning to the MAGISTRATE, speaks suddenly in a confident, straightforward voice*] The fact of the matter is, sir, that I'd been out to the theatre that night, and had supper afterwards, and I came in late.

MAGISTRATE. Do you remember this man being outside when you came in?

JACK. No, sir. [*He hesitates.*] I don't think I do.

MAGISTRATE. [*Somewhat puzzled*] Well, did he help you to open the door, as he says? Did anyone help you to open the door?

JACK. No, sir—I don't think so, sir—I don't know.

MAGISTRATE. You don't know? But you must know. It isn't a usual thing for you to have the door opened for you, is it?

JACK. [*With a shameful smile*] No.

MAGISTRATE. Very well, then——

JACK. [*Desperately*] The fact of the matter is, sir, I'm afraid I'd had too much champagne that night.

MAGISTRATE. [*Smiling*] Oh! you'd had too much champagne?

JONES. May I ask the gentleman a question?

MAGISTRATE. Yes—yes—you may ask him what questions you like.

JONES. Don't you remember you said you was a Liberal, same as your father, and you asked me wot I was?

JACK. [*With his hand against his brow*] I seem to remember——

JONES. And I said to you, "I'm a bloomin' Conservative," I said; an' you said to me, "You look more like one of these 'ere Socialists. Take wotever you like," you said.

JACK. [*With sudden resolution*] No, I don't. I don't remember anything of the sort.

JONES. Well, I do, an' my word's as good as yours. I've never been had up in a police court before. Look 'ere, don't you remember you had a sky-blue bag in your 'and——

[BARTHWICK jumps.

ROPER. I submit to your Worship that these questions are hardly to the point, the prisoner having admitted that he himself does not remember anything. [*There is a smile on the face of Justice.*] It is a case of the blind leading the blind.

JONES. [*Violently*] I've done no more than wot he 'as. I'm a poor man. I've got no money an' no friends—he's a toff—he can do wot I can't.

MAGISTRATE. Now, now! All this won't help you—you must be quiet. You say you took this box? Now, what made you take it? Were you pressed for money?

JONES. I'm always pressed for money.

MAGISTRATE. Was that the reason you took it?

JONES. No.

MAGISTRATE. [*To SNOW*] Was anything found on him?

SNOW. Yes, your Worship. There was six pounds twelve shillin's found on him, and this purse.

[*The red silk purse is handed to the MAGISTRATE. BARTHWICK rises in his seat, but hastily sits down again.*

MAGISTRATE. [*Staring at the purse*] Yes, yes—let me see——[*There is a silence.*] No, no, I've nothing before me as to the purse. How did you come by all that money?

JONES. [*After a long pause, suddenly*] I declines to say.

MAGISTRATE. But if you had all that money, what made you take this box?

JONES. I took it out of spite.

MAGISTRATE. [*Hissing, with protruded neck*] You took it out of spite? Well now, that's something! But do you imagine you can go about the town taking things out of spite?

JONES. If you had my life, if you'd been out of work——

MAGISTRATE. Yes, yes; I know—because you're out of work you think it's an excuse for everything.

JONES. [*Pointing at JACK*] You ask 'im wot made 'im take the——

ROPER. [*Quietly*] Does your Worship require this witness in the box any longer?

MAGISTRATE. [*Ironically*] I think not; he is hardly profitable. [*JACK leaves the witness-box, and, hanging his head, resumes his seat.*]

JONES. You ask 'im wot made 'im take the lady's——

[*But the BALD CONSTABLE catches him by the sleeve.*]

BALD CONSTABLE. Sssh!

MAGISTRATE. [*Emphatically*] Now listen to me. I've nothing to do with what he may or may not have taken. Why did you resist the police in the execution of their duty?

JONES. It warn't their duty to take my wife, a respectable woman, that 'adn't done nothing.

MAGISTRATE. But I say it was. What made you strike the officer a blow?

JONES. Any man would a struck 'im a blow. I'd strike 'im again, I would.

MAGISTRATE. You are not making your case any better by violence. How do you suppose we could get on if everybody behaved like you?

JONES. [*Leaning forward, earnestly*] Well, wot about 'er; who's to make up to 'er for this? Who's to give 'er back 'er good name?

MRS. JONES. Your Worship, it's the children that's preying

on his mind, because of course I've lost my work. And I've had to find another room owing to the scandal.

MAGISTRATE. Yes, yes, I know—but if he hadn't acted like this nobody would have suffered.

JONES. [*Glaring round at JACK*] I've done no worse than wot 'e 'as. Wot I want to know is wot's goin' to be done to 'im.

[*The BALD CONSTABLE again says "Hssh!"*]

ROPER. Mr. Barthwick wishes it known, your Worship, that considering the poverty of the prisoners he does not press the charge as to the box. Perhaps your Worship would deal with the case as one of disorder.

JONES. I don't want it smothered up, I want it all dealt with fair—I want my rights——

MAGISTRATE. [*Rapping his desk*] Now you have said all you have to say, and you will be quiet. [*There is a silence; the MAGISTRATE bends over and parleys with his CLERK.*] Yes, I think I may discharge the woman. [*In a kindly voice he addresses MRS. JONES, who stands unmoving with her hands crossed on the rail.*] It is very unfortunate for you that this man has behaved as he has. It is not the consequences to him but the consequences to you. You have been brought here twice, you have lost your work—[*He glares at JONES*] and this is what always happens. Now you may go away, and I am very sorry it was necessary to bring you here at all.

MRS. JONES. [*Softly*] Thank you very much, your Worship. [*She leaves the dock, and looking back at JONES, twists her fingers and is still.*]

MAGISTRATE. Yes, yes, but I can't pass it over. Go away, there's a good woman. [*MRS. JONES stands back. The MAGISTRATE leans his head on his hand; then raising it, he speaks to JONES.*] Now, listen to me. Do you wish the case to be settled here, or do you wish it to go before a Jury?

JONES. [*Muttering*] I don't want no Jury.

MAGISTRATE. Very well then, I will deal with it here. [*After a pause.*] You have pleaded guilty to stealing this box——

JONES. Not to stealin'——

BALD CONSTABLE. Hssshh.

MAGISTRATE. And to assaulting the police——

JONES. Any man as was a man——

MAGISTRATE. Your conduct here has been most improper. You give the excuse that you were drunk when you stole the box. I tell you that is no excuse. If you choose to get drunk and break the law afterwards you must take the consequences. And let me tell you that men like you, who get drunk and give way to your spite or whatever it is that's in you, are—are—a nuisance to the community.

JACK. [*Leaning from his seat*] Dad! that's what you said to me?

BARTHWICK. Tsst.

[*There is a silence, while the MAGISTRATE consults his CLERK; JONES leans forward waiting.*]

MAGISTRATE. This is your first offence, and I am going to give you a light sentence. [*Speaking sharply, but without expression.*] One month with hard labour.

[*He bends, and parleys with his CLERK. The BALD CONSTABLE and another help JONES from the dock.*]

JONES. [*Stopping and twisting round*] Call this justice? What about 'im? 'E got drunk! 'E took the purse—'e took the purse but [*in a muffled shout*] it's 'is money got 'im off—Justice! [*The prisoner's door is shut on JONES, and from the seedy-looking men and women comes a hoarse and whispering groan.*]

MAGISTRATE. We will now adjourn for lunch! [*He rises from his seat.*]

[*The Court is in a stir. ROPER gets up and speaks to the reporter. JACK, throwing up his head, walks with a swagger to the corridor; BARTHWICK follows.*]

MRS. JONES. [*Turning to him with a humble gesture*] Oh! Sir!——

[*BARTHWICK hesitates, then yielding to his nerves, he makes a shamefaced gesture of refusal, and hurries out of Court. MRS. JONES stands looking after him.*]

The curtain falls.

JOY

CAST OF THE ORIGINAL PRODUCTION AT
THE SAVOY THEATRE, LONDON, ON
SEPTEMBER 24, 1907

COLONEL HOPE.	.	.	.	<i>Mr. A. E. George</i>
MRS. HOPE	.	.	.	<i>Miss Henrietta Watson</i>
MISS BEECH	.	.	.	<i>Miss Florence Haydon</i>
LETTY	.	.	.	<i>Miss Mary Barton</i>
ERNEST BLUNT	.	.	.	<i>Mr. Frederick Lloyd</i>
MRS. GWYN	.	.	.	<i>Miss Wynne Matthison</i>
JOY	.	.	.	<i>Miss Dorothy Minto</i>
DICK MERTON.	.	.	.	<i>Mr. Alan Wade</i>
HON. MAURICE LEVER	.	.	.	<i>Mr. Thalberg Corbet</i>
ROSE	.	.	.	<i>Miss Amy Lamborn</i>

ACT I

The time is morning, and the scene a level lawn, beyond which the river is running amongst fields. A huge old beech tree over-shadows everything, in the darkness of whose hollow many things are hidden. A rustic seat encircles it. A low wall clothed in creepers, with two openings, divides this lawn from the flowery approaches to the house. Close to the wall there is a swing. The sky is clear and sunny. COLONEL HOPE is seated in a garden-chair, reading a newspaper through pince-nez. He is fifty-five, and bald, with drooping grey moustaches and a weather-darkened face. He wears a flannel suit, and a hat from Panama; a tennis racquet leans against his chair. MRS. HOPE comes quickly through the opening of the wall, with roses in her hands. She is going grey; she wears tan gauntlets, and no hat. Her manner is decided, her voice emphatic, as though aware that there is no nonsense in its owner's composition. Screened by the hollow tree, MISS BEECH is seated; and JOY is perched on a lower branch, concealed by foliage.

MRS. HOPE. I told Molly in my letter that she'd have to walk up, Tom.

COLONEL. Walk up in this heat? My dear, why didn't you order Benson's fly?

MRS. HOPE. Expense for nothing! Bob can bring up her things in the barrow. I've told Joy I won't have her going down to meet the train. She's so excited about her mother's coming there's no doing anything with her.

COLONEL. No wonder, after two months.

MRS. HOPE. Well, she's going home to-morrow; she must just keep herself fresh for the dancing to-night. I'm not going to get people in to dance, and have Joy worn out before they begin.

COLONEL. [*Dropping his paper*] I don't like Molly's walking up.

MRS. HOPE. A great strong woman like Molly Gwyn! It isn't half a mile.

COLONEL. I don't like it, Nell; it's not hospitable.

MRS. HOPE. Rubbish! If you want to throw away money, you must just find some better investment than those wretched three per cents. of yours. The green-fly are in my roses already! Did you ever see anything so *disgusting*? [*They bend over the roses they have grown and lose all sense of everything.*] Where's the syringe? I saw you mooning about with it last night, Tom.

COLONEL. [*Uneasily*] Mooning! [*He retires behind his paper.* MRS. HOPE *enters the hollow of the tree.*] There's an account of that West Australian swindle. Set of ruffians! Listen to this, Nell! "It is understood that amongst the shareholders are large numbers of women, clergymen, and Army officers." How people can be such fools!

[*Becoming aware that his absorption is unobserved, he drops his glasses, and reverses his chair towards the tree.*

MRS. HOPE. [*Reappearing with a garden syringe*] I simply won't have Dick keep his fishing things in the tree; there's a whole potful of disgusting worms. I can't touch them. You must go and take 'em out, Tom.

[*In his turn the COLONEL enters the hollow of the tree.*

MRS. HOPE. [*Personally*] What on earth's the pleasure of it? I can't see! He never catches anything worth eating.

[*The COLONEL reappears with a paint-pot full of worms; he holds them out abstractedly.*

MRS. HOPE. [*Fuming*] Don't put them near me!

MISS BEECH. [*From behind the tree*] Don't hurt the poor creatures.

COLONEL. [*Turning*] Hallo, Peachey? What are you doing round there? [*He puts the worms down on the seat.*

MRS. HOPE. Tom, take the worms off that seat at once!

COLONEL. [*Somewhat flurried*] Good gad! I don't know what to do with the beastly worms!

MRS. HOPE. It's not *my* business to look after Dick's worms. Don't put them on the ground. I won't have them anywhere where they can crawl about.

[*She flicks some green-fly off her roses.*]

COLONEL. [*Looking into the pot as though the worms could tell him where to put them*] Dash!

MISS BEECH. Give them to me.

MRS. HOPE. [*Relieved*] Yes, give them to Peachey.

[*There comes from round the tree* MISS BEECH, *old-fashioned, barrel-shaped, balloony in the skirts. She takes the paint-pot, and sits beside it on the rustic seat.*]

MISS BEECH. Poor creatures!

MRS. HOPE. Well, it's beyond *me* how you can make pets of worms—wriggling, crawling, horrible things!

[*ROSE, who is young and comely, in a pale print frock, comes from the house and places letters before her on a silver salver.*]

[*Taking the letters.*] What about Miss Joy's frock, Rose?

ROSE. Please, 'm, I can't get on with the back without Miss Joy.

MRS. HOPE. Well, then you must just find her. I don't know where she is.

ROSE. [*In a slow, sidelong manner*] If you please, Mum, I think Miss Joy's up in the——

[*She stops, seeing* MISS BEECH *signing to her with both hands.*]

MRS. HOPE. [*Sharply*] What is it, Peachey?

MISS BEECH. [*Selecting a finger*] Pricked meself!

MRS. HOPE. Let's look! [*She bends to look, but* MISS BEECH *places the finger in her mouth.*]

ROSE. [*Glancing askance at the* COLONEL] If you please, Mum, it's—below the waist, I think I can manage with the dummy.

MRS. HOPE. Well, you can try. [*Opening her letter as* ROSE *retires.*] Here's Molly about her train.

MISS BEECH. Is there a letter for me?

MRS. HOPE. No, Peachey.

MISS BEECH. There never is.

COLONEL. What's that? You got four by the first post.

MISS BEECH. Exceptions!

COLONEL. [*Looking over his glasses*] Why! You know, you get 'em every day!

MRS. HOPE. Molly says she'll be down by the eleven-thirty. [*In an injured voice*] She'll be here in half an hour! [*Reading with disapproval from the letter*] "Maurice Lever is coming down by the same train to see Mr. Henty about the Tocopala Gold Mine. Could you give him a bed for the night?" [*Silence, slight but ominous.*]

COLONEL. [*Calling in to his aid his sacred hospitality*] Of course we must give him a bed!

MRS. HOPE. Just like a man! What room I should like to know!

COLONEL. Pink.

MRS. HOPE. As if *Molly* wouldn't have the Pink!

COLONEL. [*Ruefully*] I thought she'd have the Blue!

MRS. HOPE. You know perfectly well it's full of earwigs, Tom. I killed ten there yesterday morning.

MISS BEECH. Poor creatures!

MRS. HOPE. I don't know that I approve of this Mr. Lever's dancing attendance. Molly's only thirty-six.

COLONEL. [*In a high voice*] You can't refuse him a bed; I never heard of such a thing.

MRS. HOPE. [*Reading from the letter*] "This gold mine seems to be a splendid chance. [*She glances at the COLONEL.*] I've put all my spare cash into it. They're issuing some Preference shares now; if Uncle Tom wants an investment." [*She pauses, then in a changed, decided voice*] Well, I suppose I shall have to screw him in somehow.

COLONEL. What's that about gold mines? Gambling nonsense! Molly ought to know my views.

MRS. HOPE. [*Folding the letter away out of her consciousness*] Oh! your views! This may be a specially good chance.

MISS BEECH. Ahem! Special case!

MRS. HOPE. [*Paying no attention*] I'm sick of these three per cent. dividends. When you've only got so little money, to put it all into that India Stock, when it might be earning six per cent. at least, quite safely! There are ever so many things I want.

COLONEL. There you go!

MRS. HOPE. As to Molly, I think it's high time her husband came home to look after her, instead of sticking out there in that hot place. In fact [*MISS BEECH looks up at the tree and exhibits cerebral excitement.*] I don't know what Geoff's about; why doesn't he find something in England, where they could live together.

COLONEL. Don't say anything against Molly, Nell!

MRS. HOPE. Well, I don't believe in husband and wife being separated. That's not my idea of married life. [*The COLONEL whistles quizzically.*] Ah, yes, she's *your* niece, not *mine*! Molly's very——

MISS BEECH. Ouch! [*She sucks her finger.*]

MRS. HOPE. Well, if I couldn't sew at your age, Peachey, without pricking my fingers! Tom, if I have Mr. Lever here, you'll just attend to what I say and look into that mine!

COLONEL. Look into your grandmother! I haven't made a study of geology for nothing. For every ounce you take out of a gold mine, you put an ounce and a half in. Any fool knows that, eh, Peachey?

MISS BEECH. I hate your horrid mines, with all the poor creatures underground.

MRS. HOPE. Nonsense, Peachey! As if they'd go there if they didn't want to!

COLONEL. Why don't you read your paper, then you'd see what a lot of wild-cat things there are about.

MRS. HOPE. [*Abstractedly*] I can't put Ernest and Letty in the blue room, there's only the single bed. Suppose I put Mr. Lever there, and say nothing about the earwigs. I daresay he'll never notice.

COLONEL. Treat a guest like that!

MRS. HOPE. Then where am I to put him for goodness' sake?

COLONEL. Put him in my dressing-room; I'll turn out.

MRS. HOPE. Rubbish, Tom, I won't have you turned out, that's flat. He can have Joy's room, and she can sleep with the carwigs.

JOY. [*From her hiding-place upon a lower branch of the hollow tree*] I won't. [MRS. HOPE and the COLONEL jump.]

COLONEL. God bless my soul!

MRS. HOPE. You wretched girl! I told you never to climb that tree again. Did *you* know, Peachey? [MISS BEECH smiles.] She's always up there, spoiling all her frocks. Come down now, Joy; there's a good child!

JOY. I don't want to sleep with earwigs, Aunt Nell.

MISS BEECH. I'll sleep with the poor creatures.

MRS. HOPE. [*After a pause*] Well, it would be a mercy if you would for once, Peachey.

COLONEL. Nonsense, I won't have Peachey——

MRS. HOPE. Well, who is to sleep there then?

JOY. [*Coaxingly*] Let me sleep with *Mother*, Aunt Nell, do!

MRS. HOPE. Litter her up with a great girl like you, as if we'd only one spare room! Tom, see that she comes down—I can't stay here, I must manage something.

[*She goes away towards the house.*]

COLONEL. [*Moving to the tree, and looking up*] You heard what your Aunt said?

JOY. [*Softly*] Oh, Uncle Tom!

COLONEL. I shall have to come up after you.

JOY. Oh, *do*, and Peachey too!

COLONEL. [*Trying to restrain a smile*] Peachey, you talk to her. [*Without waiting for MISS BEECH however, he proceeds.*] What'll your Aunt say to me if I don't get you down?

MISS BEECH. Poor creature!

JOY. I don't want to be worried about my frock.

COLONEL. [*Scratching his bald head*] Well, I shall catch it.

JOY. Oh, Uncle Tom, your head is so beautiful from here!

[*Leaning over, she fans it with a leafy twig.*]

MISS BEECH. Disrespectful little toad.

COLONEL. [*Quickly putting on his hat*] You'll fall out, and a pretty mess that'll make on—[*he looks uneasily at the ground*—my lawn! [*A voice is heard calling "Colonel! Colonel!"*]

JOY. There's Dick calling you, Uncle Tom.

[*She disappears.*]

DICK. [*Appearing in the opening of the wall*] Ernie's waiting to play you that single, Colonel!

[*He disappears.*]

JOY. Quick, Uncle Tom! Oh! *do* go, before he finds I am up here.

MISS BEECH. Secret little creature!

[*The COLONEL picks up his racquet, shakes his fist, and goes away.*]

JOY. [*Calmly*] I'm coming down now, Peachey. [*Climbing down.*] Look out! I'm dropping on your head.

MISS BEECH. [*Unmoved*] Don't hurt yourself!

[*JOY drops on the rustic seat and rubs her shin.*]

Told you so! [*She hunts in a little bag for plaster.*] Let's see!

JOY. [*Seeing the worms*] Ugh!

MISS BEECH. What's the matter with the poor creatures?

JOY. They're so wriggly! [*She backs away and sits down in the swing. She is just seventeen, light and slim, brown-haired, fresh-coloured, and grey-eyed; her white frock reaches to her ankles, she wears a sun-bonnet.*] Peachey, how long were you Mother's governess?

MISS BEECH. Five years.

JOY. Was she as bad to teach as me?

MISS BEECH. Worse! [*Joy claps her hands.*] She was the worst girl I ever taught.

JOY. Then you weren't fond of her?

MISS BEECH. Oh! yes, I was.

JOY. Fonder than of me?

MISS BEECH. Don't you ask such a lot of questions!

JOY. Peachey, duckie, what was Mother's *worst* fault?

MISS BEECH. Doing what she knew she oughtn't.

JOY. Was she ever sorry?

MISS BEECH. Yes, but she always went on doin' it.

JOY. I think being sorry's stupid!

MISS BEECH. Oh, do you?

JOY. It isn't any good. Was Mother revengeful, like me?

MISS BEECH. Ah! Wasn't she?

JOY. And jealous?

MISS BEECH. The most jealous girl I ever saw.

JOY. [*Nodding*] I like to be like her.

MISS BEECH. [*Regarding her intently*] Yes! you've got all your troubles before you.

JOY. Mother was married at eighteen, wasn't she, Peachey? Was she—was she much in love with Father then?

MISS BEECH. [*With a sniff*] About as much as usual. [*She takes the paint-pot, and walking round begins to release the worms.*]

JOY. [*Indifferently*] They don't get on now, you know.

MISS BEECH. What d'you mean by that, disrespectful little creature?

JOY. [*In a hard voice*] They haven't ever since I've known them.

MISS BEECH. [*Looks at her, and turns away again*] Don't talk about such things.

JOY. I suppose you don't know Mr. Lever? [*Bitterly*] He's such a cool beast. He never loses his temper.

MISS BEECH. Is that why you don't like him?

JOY. [*Frowning*] No—yes—I don't know.

MISS BEECH. Oh! perhaps you *do* like him?

JOY. I don't; I hate him.

MISS BEECH. [*Standing still*] Fie! Naughty temper!

JOY. Well, so would you! He takes up all Mother's time.

MISS BEECH. [*In a peculiar voice*] Oh! does he?

JOY. When he comes I might just as well go to bed. [*Passionately.*] And now he's chosen to-day to come down here, when I haven't seen her for two months! Why couldn't he come when Mother and I'd gone home. It's simply brutal!

MISS BEECH. But your mother likes him?

JOY. [*Sullenly*] I don't want her to like him.

MISS BEECH. [*With a long look at JOY*] I see!

JOY. What are you doing, Peachey?

MISS BEECH. [*Releasing a worm*] Letting the poor creatures go.

JOY. If I tell Dick he'll never forgive you.

MISS BEECH. [*Sidling behind the swing and plucking off JOY's sun-bonnet. With devilry*] Ah-h-h! You've done your hair up; so that's why you wouldn't come down!

JOY. [*Springing up and pouting*] I didn't want anyone to see before Mother. You are a pig, Peachey!

MISS BEECH. I thought there was something!

JOY. [*Twisting round*] How does it look?

MISS BEECH. I've seen better.

JOY. You tell anyone before Mother comes, and see what I do!

MISS BEECH. Well, don't you tell about my worms, then!

JOY. Give me my hat! [*Backing hastily towards the tree, and putting her finger to her lips.*] Look out! Dick!

MISS BEECH. Oh! dear! [*She sits down on the swing concealing the paint-pot with her feet and skirts.*]

JOY. [*On the rustic seat, and in a violent whisper*] I hope the worms will crawl up your legs!

[*DICK, in flannels and a hard straw hat, comes in. He is a quiet and cheerful boy of twenty. His eyes are always fixed on JOY.*]

DICK. [*Grimacing*] The Colonel's getting licked. Hallo! Peachey, in the swing?

JOY. [*Chuckling*] Swing her, Dick.

MISS BEECH. [*Quivering with emotion*] Little creature!

JOY. Swing her! [*DICK takes the ropes.*]

MISS BEECH. [*Quietly*] It makes me sick, young man.

DICK. [*Patting her gently on the back*] All right, Peachey.

MISS BEECH. [*Maliciously*] Could you get me my sewing from the seat! Just behind Joy.

JOY. [*Leaning her head against the tree*] If you do, I won't dance with you to-night.

[*DICK stands paralysed. MISS BEECH gets off the swing, picks up the paint-pot and stands concealing it behind her.*

JOY. Look what she's got behind her, sly old thing!

MISS BEECH. Oh! dear!

JOY. Dance with her, Dick.

MISS BEECH. If he dare!

JOY. Dance with her, or I won't dance with you to-night.
[*She whistles a waltz.*

DICK. [*Desperately*] Come on then, Peachey. We must.

JOY. Dance, dance! [*DICK seizes MISS BEECH by the waist. She drops the paint-pot. They revolve. [Convulsed]* Oh, Peachey, oh! [*MISS BEECH is dropped upon the rustic seat. DICK seizes JOY's hands and drags her up.*] No, no! I won't!

MISS BEECH. [*Panting*] Dance, dance with the poor young man. [*She moves her hands.*] La la—la la la—la la la!
[*DICK and JOY dance.*

DICK. By Jove, Joy, you've done your hair up. I say, how jolly! You *do* look——

JOY. [*Throwing her hands up to her hair*] I didn't mean you to see!

DICK. [*In a hurt voice*] Oh! didn't you? I'm awfully sorry!

JOY. [*Flashing round*] Oh, you old Peachey! [*She looks at the ground, and then again at DICK.*]

MISS BEECH. [*Sidling round the tree*] Oh! dear!

JOY. [*Whispering*] She's been letting out your worms. [*MISS BEECH disappears from view.*] Look!

DICK. [*Quickly*] Hang the worms! Joy, promise *me* the second and fourth and sixth and eighth and tenth and supper, to-night. Promise. Do! [*Joy shakes her head.*] It's not much to ask.

JOY. I won't promise anything.

DICK. Why not?

JOY. Because Mother's coming. I won't make any arrangements.

DICK. [*Tragically*] It's our last night.

JOY. [*Scornfully*] You don't understand! [*Dancing and clasping her hands.*] Mother's coming, Mother's coming!

DICK. [*Violently*] I wish—— Promise, Joy!

JOY. [*Looking over her shoulder*] Sly old thing! If you'll pay Peachey out, I'll promise you supper!

MISS BEECH. [*From behind the tree*] I hear you.

JOY. [*Whispering*] Pay her out, pay her out! She's let out all your worms!

DICK. [*Looking moodily at the paint-pot*] I say, is it true that Maurice Lever's coming with your mother? I've met him playing cricket, he's rather a good sort.

JOY. [*Flashing out*] I hate him.

DICK. [*Troubled*] Do you? Why? I thought—I didn't know—if I'd *known* of course, I'd have——

[*He is going to say "hated him too!" But the voices of ERNEST BLUNT and the COLONEL are heard approaching, in dispute.*]

JOY. Oh! Dick, hide me, I don't want my hair seen till Mother comes.

[*She springs into the hollow tree. The COLONEL and ERNEST appear in the opening of the wall.*]

ERNEST. The ball was out, Colonel.

COLONEL. Nothing of the sort.

ERNEST. A good foot out.

COLONEL. It was not, sir. I saw the chalk fly.

[*ERNEST is twenty-eight, with a little moustache, and the positive cool voice of a young man who knows that he knows everything. He is perfectly calm.*]

ERNEST. I was nearer to it than you.

COLONEL. [*In a high, hot voice*] I don't care where you were, I hate a fellow who can't keep cool.

MISS BEECH. [*From behind the hollow tree*] Fie! Fie!

ERNEST. We're two to one; Letty says the ball was out.

COLONEL. Letty's *your wife*, she'd say anything.

ERNEST. Well, look here, Colonel, I'll show you the very place it pitched.

COLONEL. Gammon! You've lost your temper, you don't know what you're talking about.

ERNEST. [*Coolly*] I suppose you'll admit the rule that one umpires one's own court.

COLONEL. [*Hotly*] Certainly not *in this case*!

MISS BEECH. [*From behind the hollow tree*] Special case!

ERNEST. [*Moving chin in collar—very coolly*] Well, of course if you won't play the game!

COLONEL. [*In a towering passion*] If you lose your temper like this, I'll never play with you again. [*To LETTY, a pretty soul in a linen suit, approaching through the wall*] Do you mean to say that ball was out, Letty?

LETTY. Of course it was, Father.

COLONEL. You say that because he's *your husband*. [*He sits on the rustic seat.*] If your mother'd been there she'd have backed me up!

LETTY. Mother wants Joy, Dick, about her frock.

DICK. I—I don't know where she is.

MISS BEECH. [*From behind the hollow tree*] Ahem!

LETTY. What's the matter, Peachey?

MISS BEECH. Swallowed a fly. Poor creature!

ERNEST. [*Returning to his point*] Why I know the ball was out, Colonel, was because it pitched in a line with that arbutus tree——

COLONEL. [*Rising*] Arbutus tree! [*To his daughter*] Where's your mother?

LETTY. In the blue room, Father.

ERNEST. The ball was a good foot out; at the height it was coming when it passed me——

COLONEL. [*Staring at him*] You're a—you're a—a theorist! From where you were you couldn't see the ball at all. [*To LETTY*] Where's your mother?

LETTY. [*Emphatically*] In the *blue* room, Father!

[The COLONEL glares confusedly, and goes away towards the blue room.]

ERNEST. [In the swing, and with a smile] Your old Dad'll never be a sportsman!

LETTY. [Indignantly] I wish you wouldn't call Father old, Ernie! What time's Molly coming, Peachey?

[ROSE has come from the house, and stands waiting for a chance to speak.]

ERNEST. [Breaking in] Your old Dad's only got one fault: he can't take an *impersonal* view of things.

MISS BEECH. Can you find me anyone who can?

ERNEST. [With a smile] Well, Peachey!

MISS BEECH. [Ironically] Oh! of course, there's you!

ERNEST. I don't know about that! But——

ROSE. [To LETTY] Please, Miss, the Missis says will you and Mr. Ernest please to move your things into Miss Peachey's room.

ERNEST. [Vexed] Deuce of a nuisance havin' to turn out for this fellow Lever. What did Molly want to bring him for?

MISS BEECH. Course you've no personal feeling in the matter!

ROSE. [Speaking to MISS BEECH] The Missis says you're to please move your things into the blue room, please, Miss.

LETTY. Aha, Peachey! That settles you! Come on, Ernie!

[She goes towards the house. ERNEST, rising from the swing, turns to MISS BEECH, who follows.]

ERNEST. [Smiling, faintly superior] Personal, not a bit! I only think while Molly's out at grass, she oughtn't to——

MISS BEECH. [Sharply] Oh! do you?

[She hustles ERNEST out through the wall, but his voice is heard faintly from the distance: "I think it's jolly thin."]

ROSE. [To DICK] The Missis says you're to take all your worms and things, sir, and put them where they won't be seen.

DICK. [Shortly] Haven't got any!

ROSE. The Missis says she'll be very angry if you don't put

your worms away; and would you come and help kill earwigs in the blue——?

DICK. Hang! *[He goes, and ROSE is left alone.]*

ROSE. *[Looking straight before her]* Please, Miss Joy, the Missis says will you go to her about your frock.

[There is a little pause, then from the hollow tree JOY's voice is heard.]

JOY. No—o!

ROSE. If you didn't come, I was to tell you she was going to put you in the blue—— *[JOY looks out of the tree.]* *[Immovable, but smiling]* Oh, Miss Joy, you've done your hair up! *[JOY retires into the tree.]* Please, Miss, what shall I tell the Missis?

JOY. *[JOY's voice is heard]* Anything you like!

ROSE. *[Over her shoulder]* I shall be drove to tell her a story, Miss.

JOY. All right! Tell it.

[ROSE goes away, and JOY comes out. She sits on the rustic seat and waits. DICK, coming softly from the house, approaches her.]

DICK. *[Looking at her intently]* Joy! I wanted to say something—— *[JOY does not look at him, but twists her fingers.]* I shan't see you again, you know, after to-morrow till I come up for the 'Varsity match.

JOY. *[Smiling]* But that's next week.

DICK. Must you go home to-morrow? *[JOY nods three times.]* *[Coming closer]* I shall miss you so awfully. You don't know how I—— *[JOY shakes her head.]* Do look at me! *[JOY steals a look.]* Oh! Joy! *[Again JOY shakes her head.]*

JOY. *[Suddenly]* Don't!

DICK. *[Seizing her hand]* Oh, Joy! Can't you——

JOY. *[Drawing her hand away]* Oh! don't.

DICK. *[Bending his head]* It's—it's—so——

JOY. *[Quietly]* Don't, Dick!

DICK. But I can't help it! It's too much for me, Joy, I must tell you——

[MRS. GWYN is seen approaching towards the house.]

JOY. [*Spinning round*] It's Mother—oh, Mother!

[*She rushes at her.*]

[*MRS. GWYN is a handsome creature of thirty-six, dressed in a muslin frock. She twists her daughter round, and kisses her.*]

MRS. GWYN. How sweet you look with your hair up, Joy! Who's this?

[*Glancing with a smile at DICK.*]

JOY. Dick Merton—in my letters you know.

[*She looks at DICK as though she wished him gone.*]

MRS. GWYN. How do you do?

DICK. [*Shaking hands*] How d'you do? I think if you'll excuse me—I'll go in.

[*He goes uncertainly.*]

MRS. GWYN. What's the matter with him?

JOY. Oh, nothing! [*Hugging her.*] Mother! You *do* look such a duck. Why did you come by the towing-path, wasn't it *cooking*?

MRS. GWYN. [*Avoiding her eyes.*] Mr. Lever wanted to go into Mr. Henty's. [*Her manner is rather artificially composed.*]

JOY. [*Dully*] Oh! Is he—is he really coming *here*, Mother?

MRS. GWYN. [*Whose voice has hardened just a little*] If Aunt Nell's got a room for him—of course—why not?

JOY. [*Digging her chin into her mother's shoulder*] Why couldn't he choose some day when we'd gone? I wanted you all to myself.

MRS. GWYN. You *are* a quaint child—when I was your age——

JOY. [*Suddenly looking up*] Oh! Mother, you must have been a chook!

MRS. GWYN. Well, I was about twice as old as you, I know that.

JOY. Had you any—any other offers before you were married, Mother?

MRS. GWYN. [*Smilingly*] Heaps!

JOY. [*Reflectively*] Oh!

MRS. GWYN. Why? Have *you* been having any?

JOY. [*Glancing at MRS. GWYN, and then down*] N—o, of course not!

MRS. GWYN. Where are they all? Where's Peachey?

JOY. Fussing about somewhere; don't let's hurry! Oh! you duckie—duckie! Aren't there any letters from Dad?

MRS. GWYN. [*In a harder voice*] Yes, one or two.

JOY. [*Hesitating*] Can't I see?

MRS. GWYN. I didn't bring them. [*Changing the subject obviously.*] Help me to tidy—I'm so hot I don't know what to do. [*She takes out a powder-puff bag, with a tiny looking-glass.*]

JOY. How lovely it'll be to-morrow—going home!

MRS. GWYN. [*With an uneasy look*] London's dreadfully stuffy, Joy. You'll only get knocked up again.

JOY. [*With consternation*] Oh! but, Mother, I *must* come.

MRS. GWYN. [*Forcing a smile*] Oh, well, if you must, you must! [*Joy makes a dash at her.*] Don't rumple me again. Here's Uncle Tom.

JOY. [*Quickly*] Mother, we're going to dance to-night, promise to dance with me; there are three more girls than men, at least, and don't dance too much with—with—you know—because I'm—[*dropping her voice and very still*]—jealous.

MRS. GWYN. [*Forcing a laugh*] You are funny!

JOY. [*Very quickly*] I haven't made any engagements because of you. [*The COLONEL approaches through the wall.*]

MRS. GWYN. Well, Uncle Tom?

COLONEL. [*Genially*] Why, Molly! [*He kisses her.*] What made you come by the towing-path?

JOY. Because it's so much cooler, of course.

COLONEL. Hallo! What's the matter with you? Phew! you've got your hair up! Go and tell your aunt your mother's on the lawn. Cut along! [*Joy goes, blowing a kiss.*] Cracked about you, Molly! Simply cracked! We shall miss her when you take her off to-morrow. [*He places a chair for her.*] Sit down, sit down, you must be tired in this heat. I've sent Bob for your things with the wheelbarrow; what have you got—only a bag, I suppose?

MRS. GWYN. [*Sitting, with a smile*] That's all, Uncle Tom, except—my trunk and hat-box.

COLONEL. Phew! And what's-his-name brought a bag, I suppose?

MRS. GWYN. They're all together. I hope it's not too much, Uncle Tom.

COLONEL. [*Dubiously*] Oh! Bob'll manage! I suppose you see a good deal of—of—Lever. That's his brother in the Guards, isn't it?

MRS. GWYN. Yes.

COLONEL. Now what does this chap do?

MRS. GWYN. What should he do, Uncle Tom? He's a Director.

COLONEL. Guinea-pig! [*Dubiously*] Your bringing him down was a good idea.

[MRS. GWYN, *looking at him sidelong, bites her lips.*] I should like to have a look at him. But, I say, you know, Molly—mines, mines! There are a lot of these chaps about, whose business is to cook their own dinners. Your aunt thinks——

MRS. GWYN. Oh! Uncle Tom, don't tell me what Aunt Nell thinks!

COLONEL. Well—well! Look here, old girl! It's *my* experience never to—what I mean is—never to trust too much to a man who has to do with mining. *I've* always refused to have anything to do with mines. If your husband were in England, of course, I'd say nothing.

MRS. GWYN. [*Very still*] We'd better keep *him* out of the question, hadn't we?

COLONEL. Of course, if you wish it, my dear.

MRS. GWYN. Unfortunately, I do.

COLONEL. [*Nervously*] Ah! yes, I know; but look here, Molly, your aunt thinks you're in a very delicate position—in fact, she thinks you see too much of young Lever——

MRS. GWYN. [*Stretching herself like an angry cat*] Does she? And what do *you* think?

COLONEL. I? I make a point of not thinking. I only know that here he is, and I don't want you to go burning your fingers, eh? [Mrs. Gwyn sits with a vindictive smile.] A gold mine's a gold mine. I don't mean he deliberately—but they take in women and parsons, and—and all sorts of fools. [Looking down.] And then, you know, I can't tell your feelings, my dear, and I don't want to; but a man about town'll compromise a woman as soon as he'll look at her, and [softly shaking his head] I don't like that, Molly! It's not the thing! [Mrs. Gwyn sits unmoved, smiling the same smile, and the Colonel gives her a nervous look.] If—if—you were any other woman—I shouldn't care—and if—if you were a plain woman, damme, you might do what you liked! I know you and Geoff don't get on; but here's this child of yours, devoted to you, and—and don't you see, old girl? Eh?

MRS. GWYN. [With a little hard laugh] Thanks! Perfectly! I suppose as you don't think, Uncle Tom, it never occurred to you that I have rather a lonely time of it.

COLONEL. [With compunction] Oh! my dear, yes, of course I know it must be beastly.

MRS. GWYN. [Stonily] It is.

COLONEL. Yes, yes! [Speaking in a surprised voice] I don't know what I am talking like this for! It's your Aunt! She goes on at me till she gets on my nerves. What d'you think she wants me to do now? Put money into this gold mine! Did you ever hear such folly?

MRS. GWYN. [Breaking into laughter] Oh! Uncle Tom.

COLONEL. All very well for you to laugh, Molly!

MRS. GWYN. [Calmly] And how much are you going to put in?

COLONEL. Not a farthing! Why, I've got nothing but my pension and three thousand India Stock!

MRS. GWYN. Only ninety pounds a year, besides your pension! D'you mean to say that's all you've got, Uncle Tom? I never knew that before. What a shame!

COLONEL. [Feelingly] It is—a d——d shame! I don't

suppose there's another case in the army of a man being treated as *I've* been.

MRS. GWYN. But how on earth do you manage here on so little?

COLONEL. [*Brooding*] Your Aunt's very funny. She's a born manager. She'd manage the hind leg off a donkey; but if *I* want five shillings for a charity or what not, I have to whistle for it. And then all of a sudden, Molly, she'll take it into here head to spend goodness knows what on some trumpery or other, and come to me for the money. If I haven't got it to give her, out she flies about three per cent., and worries me to invest in some wild-cat or other, like your friend's thing, the Jaco—what is it? I don't pay the slightest attention to her.

MRS. HOPE. [*From the direction of the house*] Tom!

COLONEL. [*Rising*] Yes, dear! [*Then dropping his voice*] I say, Molly, don't you mind what I said about young Lever. I don't want you to imagine that I think harm of people—you know I don't—but so many women come to grief, and—[*hotly*]—I can't stand men about town; not that he of course——

MRS. HOPE. [*Peremptorily*] Tom!

COLONEL. [*In hasty confidence*] I find it best to let your Aunt run on. If she says anything——

MRS. HOPE. T'o-om!

COLONEL. Yes, dear!

[*He goes hastily. MRS. GWYN sits drawing circles on the ground with her charming parasol. Suddenly she springs to her feet, and stands waiting like an animal at bay. The COLONEL and MRS. HOPE approach her talking.*]

MRS. HOPE. Well, how was *I* to know?

COLONEL. Didn't Joy come and tell you?

MRS. HOPE. I don't know what's the matter with that child? Well, Molly, so here you are. You're before your time—that train's always late.

MRS. GWYN. [*With faint irony*] I'm sorry, Aunt Nell!

[*THEY bob, seem to take fright, and kiss each other gingerly.*]

MRS. HOPE. What have you done with Mr. Lever? I

shall have to put him in Peachey's room. Tom's got no champagne.

COLONEL. They've a very decent brand down at the "George," Molly. I'll send Bob over——

MRS. HOPE. Rubbish, Tom! He'll just have to put up with what he can get!

MRS. GWYN. Of course! He's not a snob! For goodness' sake, Aunt Nell, don't put yourself out! I'm sorry I suggested his coming.

COLONEL. My dear, we *ought* to have champagne in the house—in case of accident.

MRS. GWYN. [*Shaking him gently by the coat*] No, please, Uncle Tom!

MRS. HOPE. [*Suddenly*] Now, I've told your Uncle, Molly, that he's not to go in for this gold mine without making certain it's a good thing. Mind, I think you've been very rash. I'm going to give you a good talking to; and that's not all—you oughtn't to go about like this with a young man; he's not at all bad looking. I remember him perfectly well at the Flemings' dance. [*On MRS. GWYN's lips there comes a little mocking smile.*]

COLONEL. [*Pulling his wife's sleeve*] Nell!

MRS. HOPE. No, Tom, I'm going to talk to Molly; she's old enough to know better.

MRS. GWYN. Yes?

MRS. HOPE. Yes, and you'll get yourself into a mess; I don't approve of it, and when I see a thing I don't approve of——

COLONEL. [*Walking about, and pulling his moustache*] Nell, I won't have it, I simply won't have it.

MRS. HOPE. What rate of interest are these Preference Shares to pay?

MRS. GWYN. [*Still smiling*] Ten per cent.

MRS. HOPE. What did I tell you, Tom? And are they safe?

MRS. GWYN. You'd better ask Maurice.

MRS. HOPE. There, you see, you call him Maurice! Now supposing your Uncle went in for some of them——

COLONEL. [*Taking off his hat—in a high, hot voice*] I'm not going in for anything of the sort.

MRS. HOPE. Don't swing your hat by the brim! Go and look if you can see him coming! [*The COLONEL goes.*] [*In a lower voice.*] Your Uncle's getting very bald. I've only shoulder of lamb for lunch, and a salad. It's lucky it's too hot to eat. [*MISS BEECH has appeared while she is speaking.*] Here she is, Peachey!

MISS BEECH. I see her. [*She kisses MRS. GWYN, and looks at her intently.*]

MRS. GWYN. [*Shrugging her shoulders*] Well, Peachey! What d'you make of me?

COLONEL. [*Returning from his search*] There's a white hat crossing the second stile. Is that your friend, Molly?

[*MRS. GWYN nods.*]

MRS. HOPE. Oh! before I forget, Peachey—Letty and Ernest can move their things back again. I'm going to put Mr. Lever in *your* room. [*Catching sight of the paint-pot on the ground.*] There's that disgusting paint-pot! Take it up at once, Tom, and put it in the tree.

[*The COLONEL picks up the pot and bears it to the hollow tree, followed by MRS. HOPE; he enters.*]

MRS. HOPE. [*Speaking into the tree*] Not there!

COLONEL. [*From within*] Well, where then?

MRS. HOPE. Why—up—oh! gracious!

[*MRS. GWYN, standing alone, is smiling. LEVER approaches from the towing-path. He is a man like a fencer's wrist, supple and steely. A man whose age is difficult to tell, with a quick, good-looking face, and a line between his brows; his darkish hair is flecked with grey. He gives the feeling that he has always had to spurt to keep pace with his own life.*]

MRS. HOPE. [*Also entering the hollow tree.*] No—oh!

COLONEL. [*From the depths, in a high voice*] Well, dash it then! What do you want?

MRS. GWYN. Peachey, may I introduce Mr. Lever to you? Miss Beech, my old governess. [*They shake each other by the hand.*]

LEVER. How do you do?

[His voice is pleasant, his manner easy.]

MISS BEECH. Pleased to meet you.

[Her manner is that of one who is not pleased. She watches.]

MRS. GWYN. *[Pointing to the tree—maliciously]* This is my uncle and my aunt. They're taking exercise, I think.

[The COLONEL and MRS. HOPE emerge convulsively. They are very hot. LEVER and MRS. GWYN are very cool.]

MRS. HOPE. *[Shaking hands with him]* So you've got here! Aren't you very hot?—Tom!

COLONEL. Brought a splendid day with you! Splendid!

[As he speaks, JOY comes running with a bunch of roses; seeing LEVER, she stops and stands quite rigid.]

MISS BEECH. *[Sitting in the swing]* Thunder!

COLONEL. Thunder? Nonsense, Peachey, you're always imagining something. Look at the sky!

MISS BEECH. Thunder! *[Mrs. GWYN's smile has faded.]*

MRS. HOPE. *[Turning]* Joy, don't you see Mr. Lever?

[JOY, turning to her mother, gives her the roses. With a forced smile, LEVER advances, holding out his hand.]

LEVER. How are you, Joy? Haven't seen you for an age!

JOY. *[Without expression]* I am very well, thank you.

[She raises her hand, and just touches his. Mrs. GWYN's eyes are fixed on her daughter. Miss BEECH is watching them intently; Mrs. HOPE is buttoning the COLONEL's coat.]

The curtain falls.

ACT II

It is afternoon, and at a garden-table placed beneath the hollow tree, the COLONEL is poring over plans. Astride of a garden-chair, LEVER is smoking cigarettes. DICK is hanging Chinese lanterns to the hollow tree.

LEVER. Of course, if this level [*pointing with his cigarette*] peters out to the West we shall be in a tightish place; you know what a mine is at this stage, Colonel Hope?

COLONEL. [*Absently*] Yes, yes. [*Tracing a line.*] What is there to prevent its running out here to the East?

LEVER. Well, nothing, except that as a matter of fact it doesn't.

COLONEL. [*With some excitement*] I'm very glad you showed me these papers, very glad! I say that it's a most astonishing thing if the ore suddenly stops there. [*A gleam of humour visits LEVER's face.*] I'm not an expert, but you ought to prove that ground to the East more thoroughly.

LEVER. [*Quizzically*] Of course, sir, if you advise that——

COLONEL. If it were *mine*, I'd no more sit down under the belief that the ore stopped there, than I'd—— There's a harmony in these things.

LEVER. I can only tell you what our experts say.

COLONEL. Ah! Experts! No faith in them—never had! Miners, lawyers, theologians, cowardly lot—pays them to be cowardly. When they haven't their own axes to grind, they've got their theories; a theory's a dangerous thing. [*He loses himself in contemplation of the papers.*] Now my theory is, you're in strata here of what we call the Triassic Age.

LEVER. [*Smiling faintly*] Ah!

COLONEL. You've struck a fault, that's what's happened.

The ore may be as much as thirty or forty yards out; but it's there, depend on it.

LEVER. Would you back that opinion, sir?

COLONEL. [*With dignity*] I never give an opinion that I'm not prepared to back. I want to get to the *bottom* of this. What's to prevent the gold going down *indefinitely*?

LEVER. Nothing, so far as I know.

COLONEL. [*With suspicion*] Eh!

LEVER. All I can tell you is: This is as far as we've got, and we want more money before we can get any further.

COLONEL. [*Absently*] Yes, yes; that's very usual.

LEVER. If you ask my personal opinion I think it's very doubtful that the gold does go down.

COLONEL. [*Smiling*] Oh! a *personal* opinion—on a matter of this sort!

LEVER. [*As though about to take the papers*] Perhaps we'd better close the sitting, sir; sorry to have bored you.

COLONEL. Now, now! Don't be so touchy! If I'm to put money in, I'm bound to look at it all round.

LEVER. [*With lifted brows*] Please don't imagine that I *want* you to put money in.

COLONEL. Confound it, sir! D'you suppose I take you for a Company promoter?

LEVER. Thank you!

COLONEL. [*Looking at him doubtfully*] You've got Irish blood in you—um? You're so hasty!

LEVER. If you're really thinking of taking shares—my advice to you is, don't!

COLONEL. [*Regretfully*] If this were an ordinary gold mine, I wouldn't dream of looking at it, I want you to understand that. Nobody has a greater objection to gold mines than I.

LEVER. [*Looks down at his host with half-closed eyes*] But it *is* a gold mine, Colonel Hope.

COLONEL. I know, I know; but I've been into it for *myself*; I've formed my *opinion personally*. Now, what's the reason you don't want me to invest?

LEVER. Well, if it doesn't turn out as you expect, you'll say it's my doing. I know what investors are.

COLONEL. [*Dubiously*] If it were a Westralian or a Kaffir I wouldn't touch it with a pair of tongs! It's not as if I were going to put much in! [*He suddenly bends above the papers as though magnetically attracted.*] I like these Triassic formations! [*DICK who has hung the last lantern, moodily departs.*]

LEVER. [*Looking after him*] That young man seems depressed.

COLONEL. [*As though remembering his principles*] I don't like mines, never have! [*Suddenly absorbed again*] I tell you what, Lever—this thing's got tremendous possibilities. You don't seem to believe in it enough. No mine's any good without faith; until I see for *myself*, however, I shan't commit myself beyond a thousand.

LEVER. Are you serious, sir?

COLONEL. Certainly! I've been thinking it over ever since you told me Henty had fought shy. I've a poor opinion of Henty. He's one of those fellows that says one thing and does another. An opportunist!

LEVER. [*Slowly*] I'm afraid we're all that, more or less.

[*He sits beneath the hollow tree.*]

COLONEL. A man never knows what he is himself. There's my wife. She think's she's—— By the way, don't say anything to her about this, please. And, Lever [*nervously*], I don't think, you know, this is *quite* the sort of thing for my niece.

LEVER. [*Quietly*] I agree. I mean to get her out of it.

COLONEL. [*A little taken aback*] Ah! You know, she—she's in a very delicate position, living by herself in London. [*LEVER looks at him ironically.*] You [*very nervously*] see a good deal of her? If it hadn't been for Joy growing so fast, we shouldn't have had the child down here. Her Mother ought to have her with her. Eh! Don't you think so?

LEVER. [*Forcing a smile*] Mrs. Gwyn always seems to me to get on all right.

COLONEL. [*As though making a discovery*] You know, I've found that when a woman's living alone and unprotected, the very least thing will set a lot of hags and jackanapes talking. [*Hotly*] The more unprotected and helpless a woman is, the more they revel in it. If there's anything I hate in this world, it's those wretched creatures who babble about their neighbours' affairs.

LEVER. I agree with you.

COLONEL. One ought to be very careful not to give them—that is [*checks himself confused; then hurrying on*—I suppose you and Joy get on all right?

LEVER. [*Coolly*] Pretty well, thanks. I'm not exactly in Joy's line; haven't seen very much of her, in fact.

[*MISS BEECH and JOY have been approaching from the house. But seeing LEVER, JOY turns abruptly, hesitates a moment, and with an angry gesture goes away.*

COLONEL. [*Unconscious*] Wonderfully affectionate little thing! Well, she'll be going home to-morrow!

MISS BEECH. [*Who has been gazing after JOY*] Talkin' business, poor creatures?

LEVER. Oh, no! If you'll excuse me, I'll wash my hands before tea.

[*He glances at the COLONEL poring over papers, and, shrugging his shoulders, strolls away.*

MISS BEECH. [*Sitting in the swing*] I see your horrid papers.

COLONEL. Be quiet, Peachey!

MISS BEECH. On a beautiful summer's day, too.

COLONEL. That'll do now.

MISS BEECH. [*Unmoved*] For every ounce you take out of a gold mine you put two in.

COLONEL. Who told you that rubbish?

MISS BEECH. [*With devilry*] You did!

COLONEL. This isn't an ordinary gold mine.

MISS BEECH. Oh! quite a *special* thing.

[*COLONEL stares at her, but subsiding at her impassivity he pores again over the papers.*

[ROSE has approached with a tea cloth.

ROSE. If you please, sir, the missis told me to lay the tea.

COLONEL. Go away! Ten fives fifty. Ten 5-16ths, Peachey?

MISS BEECH. I hate your nasty sums!

[ROSE goes away. The COLONEL writes. MRS. HOPE'S voice is heard, "Now then, bring those chairs, you two. Not that one, Ernest." ERNEST and LETTY appear through the opening of the wall, each with a chair.

COLONEL. [With dull exasperation] What do you want!

LETTY. Tea, Father. [She places her chair and goes away.

ERNEST. That Johnny-bird Lever is too cocksure for me, Colonel. Those South American things are no good at all. I know all about *them* from young Scrotton. There's not one that's worth a red cent. If you want a flutter——

COLONEL. [Explosively] Flutter! I'm not a gambler, sir!

ERNEST. Well, Colonel [with a smile] I only don't want you to chuck your money away on a stiff 'un. If you want anything good you should go to Mexico.

COLONEL. [Jumping up and holding out the map] Go to—— [He stops in time.] What d'you call that, eh? M-E-X——

ERNEST. [Not to be embarrassed] It all depends on what part.

COLONEL. You think you know everything—you think nothing's right unless it's your own idea! Be good enough to keep your advice to yourself.

ERNEST. [Moving with his chair, and stopping with a smile] If you ask me, I should say it wasn't playing the game to put Molly into a thing like that.

COLONEL. What do you mean, sir?

ERNEST. Any Juggins can see that she's a bit gone on our friend.

COLONEL. [Freezingly] Indeed!

ERNEST. He's not at all the sort of Johnny that appeals to me.

COLONEL. Really?

ERNEST. [Unmoved] If I were you, Colonel, I should tip

her the wink. He was hanging about her at Ascot all the time. It's a bit thick!

[MRS. HOPE, followed by ROSE, appears from the house.]

COLONEL. [*Stammering with passion*] Jackanapes!

MRS. HOPE. Don't stand there, Tom; clear those papers, and let Rose lay the table. Now, Ernest, go and get another chair.

[*The COLONEL looks wildly round and sits beneath the hollow tree, with his head held in his hands. ROSE lays the cloth.*]

MISS BEECH. [*Sitting beside the COLONEL*] Poor creature!

ERNEST. [*Carrying his chair about with him*] Ask any Johnny in the City, he'll tell you Mexico's a very tricky country—the people are awful rotters——

MRS. HOPE. Put that chair down, Ernest. [ERNEST *looks at the chair, puts it down, opens his mouth, and goes away. ROSE follows him.*] What's he been talking about? You oughtn't to get so excited, Tom; is your head bad, old man? Here, take these papers! [*She hands the papers to the COLONEL.*] Peachey, go in and tell them tea'll be ready in a minute, there's a good soul! Oh! and on my dressing-table you'll find a bottle of eau-de-Cologne——

MISS BEECH. Don't let him get in a temper again? That's three times to-day! [*She goes towards the house.*]

COLONEL. Never met such a fellow in my life, the most opinionated, narrow-minded—thinks he knows everything. Whatever Letty could see in him I can't think. Pragmatical beggar!

MRS. HOPE. Now, Tom! What have you been up to, to get into a state like this?

COLONEL. [*Avoiding her eyes*] I shall lose my temper with him one of these days. He's got that confounded habit of thinking nobody can be right but himself.

MRS. HOPE. That's enough! I want to talk to you seriously! Dick's in love. I'm perfectly certain of it.

COLONEL. Love! Who's he in love with—Peachey?

MRS. HOPE. You can see it all over him. If I saw any

signs of Joy's breaking out, I'd send them both away. I simply won't have it.

COLONEL. Why, she's a child!

MRS. HOPE. [*Pursuing her own thoughts*] But she isn't—not yet. I've been watching her very carefully. She's more in love with her Mother than anyone, follows her about like a dog! She's been quite rude to Mr. Lever.

COLONEL. [*Pursuing his own thoughts*] I don't believe a word of it. [*He rises and walks about.*]

MRS. HOPE. Don't believe a word of what?

[*The COLONEL is silent.*]

[*Pursuing his thoughts with her own.*] If I thought there were anything between Molly and Mr. Lever d'you suppose I'd have him in the house? [*The COLONEL stops, and gives a sort of grunt.*] He's a very nice fellow; and I want you to pump him well, Tom, and see what there is in this mine.

COLONEL. [*Uneasily*] Pump!

MRS. HOPE. [*Looking at him curiously*] Yes, you've been up to something! Now what is it?

COLONEL. Pump my own guest! I never heard of such a thing!

MRS. HOPE. There you are, on your high horse! I do wish you had a little common sense, Tom!

COLONEL. I'd as soon you ask me to sneak about eaves-dropping! Pump!

MRS. HOPE. Well, what were you looking at these papers for? It does drive me so wild the way you throw away all the chances you have of making a little money. I've got you this opportunity, and you do nothing but rave up and down, and talk nonsense!

COLONEL. [*In a high voice*] Much you know about it! I've taken a thousand shares in this mine! [*He stops dead. There is a silence.*]

MRS. HOPE. You've—WHAT? Without consulting me? Well, then, you'll just go and take them out again!

COLONEL. You want me to——?

MRS. HOPE. The idea! As if you could trust your judgment in a thing like that! You'll just go at once and say there was a mistake; then we'll talk it over calmly.

COLONEL. [*Drawing himself up*] Go back on what I've said? Not if I lose every penny! First you worry me to take the shares, and then you worry me not—I won't have it, Nell, I won't have it!

MRS. HOPE. Well, if I'd thought you'd have forgotten what you said this morning and turned about like this, d'you suppose I'd have spoken to you at all? Now, do you?

COLONEL. Rubbish! If you can't see that this is a special opportunity!

[*He walks away followed by MRS. HOPE, who endeavours to make him see her point of view. ERNEST and LETTY are now returning from the house armed with a third chair.*]

LETTY. What's the matter with everybody? Is it the heat?

ERNEST. [*Preoccupied and sitting in the swing*] That sportsman, Lever, you know, ought to be warned off.

[*ROSE has followed with the tea-tray.*]

LETTY. [*Signing to ERNEST*] Where's Miss Joy, Rose?

ROSE. Don't know, Miss. [*Putting down the tray, she goes.*]

LETTY. Ernie, be careful, you never know where Joy is.

ERNEST. [*Preoccupied with his reflections*] Your old Dad's as mad as a hatter with me.

LETTY. Why?

ERNEST. Well, I merely said what I thought, that Molly ought to look out what she's doing, and he dropped on me like a cartload of bricks.

LETTY. The Dad's very fond of Molly.

ERNEST. But look here, d'you mean to tell me that she and Lever aren't——

LETTY. Don't! Suppose they are! If Joy were to hear it'd be simply awful. I *like* Molly. I'm not going to believe anything against her. I don't see the use of it. If it is, it is, and if it isn't, it isn't.

ERNEST. Well, all I know is that when I told her the mine was probably a frost she went for me like steam.

LETTY. Well, so should I. She was only sticking up for her friends.

ERNEST. Ask the old Peachey-bird. She knows a thing or two. Look here, I don't mind a man's being a bit of a sportsman, but I think Molly's bringin' him down here is too thick. Your old Dad's got one of his notions that because this Josses's his guest, he must keep him in a glass case, and take shares in his mine, and all the rest of it.

LETTY. I do think people are horrible, always thinking things. It's not as if Molly were a stranger. She's *my own cousin*. I'm not going to believe anything about my own cousin. I simply *won't*.

ERNEST. [*Reluctantly realizing the difference that this makes*] I suppose it *does* make a difference, her bein' your cousin.

LETTY. Of course it does! I only hope to goodness no one will make Joy suspect——

[*She stops and puts her finger to her lips, for JOY is coming towards them, as the tea-bell sounds. She is followed by DICK and MISS BEECH with the eau-de-Cologne. The COLONEL and MRS. HOPE are also coming back, discussing still each other's point of view.*]

JOY. Where's Mother? Isn't she here?

MRS. HOPE. Now, Joy, come and sit down; your mother's been told tea's ready; if she lets it get cold it's her look out.

DICK. [*Producing a rug, and spreading it beneath the tree*] Plenty of room, Joy.

JOY. I don't believe Mother knows, Aunt Nell.

[*MRS. GWYN and LEVER appear in the opening of the wall.*]

LETTY. [*Touching ERNEST's arm*] Look, Ernie! Four couples and Peachey——

ERNEST. [*Preoccupied*] What couples?

JOY. Oh! Mums, here you are!

[*Seizing her, she turns her back on LEVER. They sit in various seats, and MRS. HOPE pours out the tea.*]

MRS. HOPE. Hand the sandwiches to Mr. Lever, Peachey. It's our own jam, Mr. Lever.

LEVER. Thanks. [*He takes a bite.*] It's splendid!

MRS. GWYN. [*With forced gaiety*] It's the first time I've ever seen you eat jam.

LEVER. [*Smiling a forced smile*] Really! But I love it.

MRS. GWYN. [*With a little bow*] You always refuse mine.

JOY. [*Who has been staring at her enemy, suddenly*] I'm all burnt up! Aren't you simply boiled, Mother? [*She touches her Mother's forehead.*]

MRS. GWYN. Ugh! You're quite clammy, Joy.

JOY. It's enough to make anyone clammy.

[*Her eyes go back to LEVER's face as though to stab him.*]

ERNEST. [*From the swing*] I say, you know, the glass is going down.

LEVER. [*Suavely*] The glass in the hall's steady enough.

ERNEST. Oh, I never go by that; that's a rotten old glass.

COLONEL. Oh! is it?

ERNEST. [*Paying no attention*] I've got a little ripper—never puts you in the cart. Bet you what you like we have thunder before to-morrow night.

MISS BEECH. [*Removing her gaze from JOY to LEVER*] You don't think we shall have it before to-night, do you?

LEVER. [*Suavely*] I beg your pardon; did you speak to me?

MISS BEECH. I said, you don't think we shall have the thunder before to-night, do you?

[*She resumes her watch on JOY.*]

LEVER. [*Blandly*] Really, I don't see any signs of it.

[*JOY, crossing to the rug, flings herself down. And DICK sits cross-legged, with his eyes fast fixed on her.*]

MISS BEECH. [*Eating*] People don't often see what they don't want to, do they? [*LEVER only lifts his brows.*]

MRS. GWYN. [*Quickly breaking in*] What are you talking about? The weather's perfect.

MISS BEECH. Isn't it?

MRS. HOPE. You'd better make a good tea, Peachey;

nobody'll get anything till eight, and then only cold shoulder. You must just put up with no hot dinner, Mr. Lever.

LEVER. [*Bowing*] Whatever is good enough for Miss Beech is good enough for me.

MISS BEECH. [*Sardonically—taking another sandwich*] So you think!

MRS. GWYN. [*With forced gaiety*] Don't be so absurd, Peachey. [*MISS BEECH grunts slightly.*]

COLONEL. [*Once more busy with his papers*] I see the name of your engineer is Rodriguez—Italian, eh?

LEVER. Portuguese.

COLONEL. Don't like that!

LEVER. I believe he was born in England.

COLONEL. [*Reassured*] Oh, was he? Ah!

ERNEST. Awful rotters, those Portuguese!

COLONEL. There you go!

LETTY. Well, Father, Ernie only said what you said.

MRS. HOPE. Now I want to ask you, Mr. Lever, is this gold mine safe? If it isn't—I simply won't allow Tom to take these shares; he can't afford it.

LEVER. It rather depends on what you call safe, Mrs. Hope.

MRS. HOPE. I don't want anything extravagant, of course; if they're going to pay their ten per cent. regularly, and Tom can have his money out at any time—— [*There is a faint whistle from the swing.*] I only want to know that it's a thoroughly genuine thing.

MRS. GWYN. [*Indignantly*] As if Maurice would be a director if it wasn't?

MRS. HOPE. Now, Molly, I'm simply asking——

MRS. GWYN. Yes, you are!

COLONEL. [*Rising*] I'll take two thousand of those shares, Lever. To have my wife talk like that—I'm quite ashamed.

LEVER. Oh, come, sir, Mrs. Hope only meant——

[*MRS. GWYN looks eagerly at LEVER.*]

DICK. [*Quietly*] Let's go on the river, Joy.

[*Joy rises, and goes to her Mother's chair.*]

MRS. HOPE. Of course! What rubbish, Tom! As if anyone ever invested money without making sure!

LEVER. [*Ironically*] It seems a little difficult to make sure in this case. There isn't the smallest necessity for Colonel Hope to take any shares, and it looks to me as if he'd better not.

[*He lights a cigarette.*]

MRS. HOPE. Now, Mr. Lever, don't be offended! I'm very anxious for Tom to take the shares if you say the thing's so good.

LEVER. I'm afraid I must ask to be left out, please.

JOY. [*Whispering*] Mother, if you've finished, do come, I want to show you my room.

MRS. HOPE. I wouldn't say a word, only Tom's so easily taken in.

MRS. GWYN. [*Fiercely*] Aunt Nell, how can you?

[*Joy gives a little savage laugh.*]

LETTY. [*Hastily*] Ernie, will you play Dick and me? Come on, Dick!

[*All three go out towards the lawn.*]

MRS. HOPE. You ought to know your Uncle by this time, Molly. He's just like a child. He'd be a pauper to-morrow if I didn't see to things.

COLONEL. Understand once for all that I shall take two thousand shares in this mine. I'm—I'm humiliated.

[*He turns and goes towards the house.*]

MRS. HOPE. Well, what on earth have I said?

[*She hurries after him.*]

MRS. GWYN. [*In a low voice as she passes*] You needn't insult my friends!

[*LEVER, shrugging his shoulders, has strolled aside. JOY, with a passionate movement seen only by MISS BEECH, goes off towards the house. MISS BEECH and MRS. GWYN are left alone beside the remnants of the feast.*]

MISS BEECH. Molly! [*MRS. GWYN looks up startled.*] Take care, Molly, take care! The child! Can't you see? [*Apostrophizing LEVER.*] Take care, Molly, take care!

LEVER. [*Coming back*] Awfully hot, isn't it?

MISS BEECH. Ah! and it'll be hotter if we don't mind.

LEVER. [*Suavely*] Do we control these things? [MISS BEECH *looking from face to face, nods her head repeatedly; then gathering her skirts she walks towards the house.* MRS. GWYN *sits motionless, staring before her.*] Extraordinary old lady! [*He pitches away his cigarette.*] What's the matter with her, Molly?

MRS. GWYN. [*With an effort*] Oh! Peachey's a character!

LEVER. [*Frowning*] So I see! [*There is a silence.*]

MRS. GWYN. Maurice!

LEVER. Yes.

MRS. GWYN. Aunt Nell's hopeless, you mustn't mind her.

LEVER. [*In a dubious and ironic voice*] My dear girl, I've too much to bother me to mind trifles like that.

MRS. GWYN. [*Going to him suddenly*] Tell me, won't you? [LEVER *shrugs his shoulders.*] A month ago you'd have told me soon enough!

LEVER. Now, Molly!

MRS. GWYN. Ah! [*With a bitter smile.*] The Spring's soon over.

LEVER. It's always Spring between us.

MRS. GWYN. Is it?

LEVER. You didn't tell me what *you* were thinking about just now when you sat there like stone.

MRS. GWYN. It doesn't do for a *woman* to say too much.

LEVER. Have I been so bad to you that you need feel like that, Molly?

MRS. GWYN. [*With a little warm squeeze of his arm*] Oh! my dear, it's only that I'm so—— [*She stops.*]

LEVER. [*Gently*] So what?

MRS. GWYN. [*In a low voice*] It's hateful here.

LEVER. I didn't want to come. I don't understand why you suggested it. [MRS. GWYN *is silent.*] It's been a mistake!

MRS. GWYN. [*Her eyes fixed on the ground*] Joy comes home to-morrow. I thought if I brought you here—I should know——

LEVER. [*Vexedly*] Um!

MRS. GWYN. [*Losing her control*] Can't you see? It haunts me? How are we to go on? I must know—I must know!

LEVER. I don't see that my coming——

MRS. GWYN. I thought I should have more confidence; I thought I should be able to face it better in London, if you came down here openly—and now—I feel I mustn't speak or look at you.

LEVER. You don't think your Aunt——

MRS. GWYN. [*Scornfully*] She! It's only Joy I care about.

LEVER. [*Frowning*] We must be more careful, that's all. We mustn't give ourselves away again as we were doing just now.

MRS. GWYN. When anyone says anything horrid to you, I can't help it. [*She puts her hand on the lapel of his coat.*]

LEVER. My dear child, take care! [*MRS. GWYN drops her hand. She throws her head back, and her throat is seen to work as though she were gulping down a bitter draught. She moves away.*] [*Following hastily*] Don't dear, don't! I only meant—— Come, Molly, let's be sensible. I want to tell you something about the mine.

MRS. GWYN. [*With a quavering smile*] Yes—let's talk sensibly, and walk properly in this sensible, proper place.

[*LEVER is seen trying to soothe her, and yet to walk properly. As they disappear, they are viewed by JOY, who like the shadow parted from its figure, has come to join it again. She stands now, foiled, a carnation in her hand; then flings herself on a chair, and leans her elbows on the table.*]

JOY. I hate him! Pig!

ROSE. [*Who has come to clear the tea things*] Did you call, Miss?

JOY. Not you!

ROSE. [*Motionless*] No, Miss!

JOY. [*Leaning back and tearing the flower*] Oh! do hurry up, Rose!

ROSE. [*Collects the tea things*] Mr. Dick's coming down the path! Aren't I going to get you to do your frock, Miss Joy?

JOY. No.

ROSE. What will the Missis say?

JOY. Oh, *don't* be so stuck, Rose!

[ROSE goes, but DICK has come.]

DICK. Come on the river, Joy, just for half an hour, as far as the kingfishers—do! [JOY shakes her head.] Why not? It'll be so jolly and cool. I'm most awfully sorry if I worried you this morning. I didn't mean to. I won't again, I promise. [JOY slides a look at him, and from that look he gains a little courage.] Do come! It'll be the last time. I feel it awfully, Joy.

JOY. There's nothing to hurt you!

DICK. [Gloomily] Isn't there—when you're like this?

JOY. [In a hard voice] If you don't like me, why do you follow me about?

DICK. What is the matter?

JOY. [Looking up, as if for want of air] Oh! don't!

DICK. Oh, Joy, what is the matter? Is it the heat?

JOY. [With a little laugh] Yes.

DICK. Have some eau-de-Cologne. I'll make you a bandage. [He takes the eau-de-Cologne, and makes a bandage with his handkerchief.] It's quite clean.

JOY. Oh, Dick, you are so funny!

DICK. [Bandaging her forehead] I can't bear you to feel bad; it puts me off completely. I mean I don't generally make a fuss about people, but when it's you——

JOY. [Suddenly] I'm all right.

DICK. Is that comfy?

JOY. [With her chin up, and her eyes fast closed] Quite.

DICK. I'm not going to stay and worry you. You ought to rest. Only, Joy! Look here! If you want me to do anything for you, any time——

JOY. [Half opening her eyes] Only to go away.

[DICK bites his lips and walks away.]

DICK—[softly]—Dick! [DICK stops.] I didn't mean that; will you get me some water-irises for this evening?

DICK. Won't I? [*He goes to the hollow tree and from its darkness takes a bucket and a boat hook.*] I know where there are some rippers! [*Joy stays unmoving with her eyes half closed.*] Are you sure you're all right, Joy? You'll just rest here in the shade, won't you, till I come back; it'll do you no end of good. I shan't be twenty minutes. [*He goes, but cannot help returning softly, to make sure.*] You're quite sure you're all right?

[*JOY nods. He goes away towards the river. But there is no rest for JOY. The voices of MRS. GWYN and LEVER are heard returning.*]

JOY. [*With a gesture of anger*] Hateful! Hateful!

[*She runs away.*]

[*MRS. GWYN and LEVER are seen approaching; they pass the tree, in conversation.*]

MRS. GWYN. But I don't see why, Maurice.

LEVER. We mean to sell the mine; we must do some more work on it, and for that we must have money.

MRS. GWYN. If you only want a little, I should have thought you could have got it in a minute in the City.

LEVER. [*Shaking his head*] No, no; we must get it privately.

MRS. GWYN. [*Doubtfully*] Oh! [*She slowly adds*] Then it isn't such a good thing! [*And she does not look at him.*]

LEVER. Well, we mean to sell it.

MRS. GWYN. What about the people who buy?

LEVER. [*Dubiously regarding her*] My dear girl, they've just as much chance as *we* had. It's not my business to think of them. There's *your* thousand pounds——

MRS. GWYN. [*Softly*] Don't bother about *my* money, Maurice. I don't want you to do anything not quite——

LEVER. [*Evasively*] Oh! There's my brother's and my sister's too. I'm not going to let any of you run any risk. When we all went in for it the thing looked splendid; it's only the last month that we've had doubts. What bothers me now is your Uncle. I don't want him to take these shares. It looks as if I'd come here on purpose.

MRS. GWYN. Oh! he *mustn't* take them!

LEVER. That's all very well; but it's not so simple.

MRS. GWYN. [*Shyly*] But, Maurice, have you told him about the selling?

LEVER. [*Gloomily, under the hollow tree*] It's a Board secret. I'd no business to tell even you.

MRS. GWYN. But he thinks he's taking shares in a good—a permanent thing.

LEVER. You can't go into a mining venture without some risk.

MRS. GWYN. Oh, yes, I know—but—but Uncle Tom is such a dear!

LEVER. [*Stubbornly*] I can't help his being the sort of man he is. I didn't want him to take these shares, I told him so in so many words. Put yourself in my place, Molly, how can I go to him and say—"This thing may turn out rotten," when he knows I got you to put your money into it?

[*But JOY, the lost shadow, has come back. She moves forward resolutely. They are divided from her by the hollow tree; she is unseen. She stops.*]

MRS. GWYN. I think he ought to be told about the selling; it's not fair.

LEVER. What on earth made him rush at the thing like that? I don't understand that kind of man?

MRS. GWYN. [*Impulsively*] I must tell him, Maurice; I can't let him take the shares without——

[*She puts her hand on his arm.*]

[*JOY turns, as if to go back whence she came, but stops once more.*]

LEVER. [*Slowly and very quietly*] I didn't think you'd give me away, Molly.

MRS. GWYN. I don't think I quite understand.

LEVER. If you tell the Colonel about this sale the poor old chap will think me a man that you ought to have nothing to do with. Do you want that? [MRS. GWYN, giving her lover a long look, touches his sleeve. JOY, slipping behind the hollow tree, has gone.] You can't act in a case like this as if you'd only a principle to consider. It's the—the special circumstances——

MRS. GWYN. [*With a faint smile*] But you'll be glad to get the money, won't you?

LEVER. By George, if you're going to take it like this, Molly!

MRS. GWYN. Don't!

LEVER. We may not sell after all, dear, we may find it turn out trumps.

MRS. GWYN. [*With a shiver*] I don't want to hear any more. I know women don't understand. [*Impulsively*] It's only that I can't bear anyone should think that *you*——

LEVER. [*Distressed*] For goodness' sake, don't look like that, Molly! Of course, I'll speak to your Uncle. I'll stop him somehow, even if I have to make a fool of myself. I'll do anything you want——

MRS. GWYN. I feel as if I were being smothered here.

LEVER. It's only for one day.

MRS. GWYN. [*With sudden tenderness*] It's not your fault, dear. I ought to have known how it would be. Well, let's go in!

[*She sets her lips, and walks towards the house with LEVER following. But no sooner has she disappeared than JOY comes running after; she stops, as though throwing down a challenge. Her cheeks and ears are burning.*]

JOY. Mother!

[*After a moment MRS. GWYN reappears in the opening of the wall.*]

MRS. GWYN. Oh! here you are!

JOY. [*Breathlessly*] Yes.

MRS. GWYN. [*Uncertainly*] Where—have you been? You look dreadfully hot; have you been running?

JOY. Yes—no.

MRS. GWYN. [*Looking at her fixedly*] What's the matter—you're trembling! [*Softly*] Aren't you well, dear?

JOY. Yes—I don't know.

MRS. GWYN. What is it, darling?

JOY. [*Suddenly clinging to her*] Oh! Mother!

MRS. GWYN. I don't understand.

JOY. [*Breathlessly*] Oh, Mother, let me go back home with you now at once——

MRS. GWYN. [*Her face hardening*] Why? What on earth——

JOY. I can't stay here.

MRS. GWYN. But why?

JOY. I want to be with *you*—Oh! Mother, don't you love me?

MRS. GWYN. [*With a faint smile*] Of course I love you, Joy.

JOY. Ah! but you love *him* more.

MRS. GWYN. Love him—whom?

JOY. Oh! Mother, I didn't—— [*She tries to take her Mother's hand, but fails.*] Oh! *don't*.

MRS. GWYN. You'd better explain what you mean, I think.

JOY. I want to get you to—he—he's—he's—not——!

MRS. GWYN. [*Frigidly*] Really, Joy!

JOY. [*Passionately*] I'll fight against him, and I know there's something wrong about—— [*She stops.*]

MRS. GWYN. About what?

JOY. Let's tell Uncle Tom, Mother, and go away.

MRS. GWYN. Tell Uncle Tom—what?

JOY. [*Looking down and almost whispering*] About—about—the mine.

MRS. GWYN. What about the mine? What do you mean? [*Fiercely*] Have you been spying on me?

JOY. [*Shrinking*] No! oh, no!

MRS. GWYN. Where were you?

JOY. [*Just above her breath*] I—I heard something.

MRS. GWYN. [*Bitterly*] But you were not spying?

JOY. I wasn't—I wasn't! I didn't want—to hear. I only heard a little. I couldn't help listening, Mother.

MRS. GWYN. [*With a little laugh*] Couldn't help listening?

JOY. [*Through her teeth*] I *hate him*. I didn't mean to listen, but I hate him.

MRS. GWYN. I see. [*There is a silence.*] Why do you hate him?

JOY. He—he—— [*She stops.*]

MRS. GWYN. Yes?

JOY. [*With a sort of despair*] I don't know. Oh! I don't know! But I feel——

MRS. GWYN. I can't reason with you. As to what you heard, it's—ridiculous.

JOY. It's not that. It's—it's you!

MRS. GWYN. [*Stonily*] I don't know what you mean.

JOY. [*Passionately*] I wish Dad were here!

MRS. GWYN. Do you love your Father as much as me?

JOY. Oh! Mother, no—you *know* I don't.

MRS. GWYN. [*Resentfully*] Then why do you want him?

JOY. [*Almost under her breath*] Because of that man.

MRS. GWYN. Indeed!

JOY. I will never—never make friends with him.

MRS. GWYN. [*Cuttingly*] I have not asked you to.

JOY. [*With a blind movement of her hand*] Oh, Mother! [*Mrs. Gwyn half turns away.*] Mother—won't you? Let's tell Uncle Tom, and go away from him?

MRS. GWYN. If you were not a child, Joy, you wouldn't say such things.

JOY. [*Eagerly*] I'm not a child, I'm—I'm a woman. I *am*.

MRS. GWYN. No! You—are—not a woman, Joy.

[*She sees JOY throw up her arms as though warding off a blow, and turning finds that LEVER is standing in the opening of the wall.*]

LEVER. [*Looking from face to face*] What's the matter? [*There is no answer.*] What is it, Joy?

JOY. [*Passionately*] I heard you, I don't care who knows. I'd listen again.

LEVER. [*Impassively*] Ah! and what did I say that was so very dreadful?

JOY. You're a—a—you're a—coward!

MRS. GWYN. [*With a sort of groan*] Joy!

LEVER. [*Stepping up to JOY, and standing with his hands*

behind him—in a low voice] Now, hit me in the face—hit me—hit me as hard as you can. Go on, Joy, it'll do you good. [*Joy raises her clenched hand, but drops it, and hides her face.*] Why don't you? I'm not pretending! [*Joy makes no sign.*] Come, Joy; you'll make yourself ill, and that won't help, will it? [*But Joy still makes no sign.*] [*With determination*] What's the matter; now come—tell me!

JOY. [*In a stifled, sullen voice*] Will you leave my mother alone?

MRS. GWYN. Oh! my dear Joy, don't be silly!

JOY. [*Winning; then with sudden passion*] I defy you—I defy you! [*She rushes from their sight.*]

MRS. GWYN. [*With a movement of distress*] Oh!

LEVER. [*Turning to MRS. GWYN with a protecting gesture*] Never mind, dear! It'll be—it'll be all right!

[*But the expression of his face is not the expression of his words.*]

The curtain falls.

ACT III

It is evening; a full yellow moon is shining through the branches of the hollow tree. The Chinese lanterns are alight. There is dancing in the house; the music sounds now loud, now soft. MISS BEECH is sitting on the rustic seat in a black bunchy evening dress, whose inconspicuous opening is inlaid with white. She slowly fans herself.

DICK comes from the house in evening dress. He does not see MISS BEECH.

DICK. Curse! [*A short silence.*] Curse!

MISS BEECH. Poor young man!

DICK. [*With a start*] Well, Peachey, I can't help it.
[He fumbles off his gloves.]

MISS BEECH. Did you ever know anyone that could?

DICK. [*Earnestly*] It's such awfully hard lines on Joy. I can't get her out of my head, lying there with that beastly headache while everybody's jigging round.

MISS BEECH. Oh! you don't mind about yourself—noble young man!

DICK. I should be a brute if I didn't mind more for her.

MISS BEECH. So you think it's a headache, do you?

DICK. Didn't you hear what Mrs. Gwyn said at dinner about the sun? [*With inspiration*] I say, Peachey, couldn't you—couldn't you just go up and give her a message from me, and find out if there's anything she wants, and say how brutal it is that she's seedy; it would be most awfully decent of you. And tell her the dancing's no good without her. Do, Peachey, now do! Ah! and look here! [*He dives into the hollow of the tree, and brings from out of it a pail of water, in which are placed two bottles of champagne, and some yellow irises—he takes the*

irises.] You might give her these. I got them specially for her, and I haven't had a chance.

MISS BEECH. [*Lifting a bottle*] What's this?

DICK. Fizz. The Colonel brought it from the "George." It's for supper; he put it in here because of—— [*Smiling faintly*] Mrs. Hope, I think. Peachey, *do* take her those irises.

MISS BEECH. D'you think they'll do her any good?

DICK. [*Crestfallen*] I thought she'd like—— I don't want to worry her—you might try. [*MISS BEECH shakes her head.*] Why not?

MISS BEECH. The poor little creature won't let me in.

DICK. You've *been* up then!

MISS BEECH. [*Sharply*] Of course I've been up. I've not got a stone for my heart, young man!

DICK. All right! I suppose I shall just have to get along somehow.

MISS BEECH. [*With devilry*] That's what we've all got to do.

DICK. [*Gloomily*] But this is too brutal for anything.

MISS BEECH. Worse than ever happened to anyone!

DICK. I swear I'm not thinking of *myself*.

MISS BEECH. Did y'ever know anybody that swore they were?

DICK. Oh! shut up!

MISS BEECH. You'd better go in and get yourself a partner.

DICK. [*With pale desperation*] Look here, Peachey, I simply loathe all those girls.

MISS BEECH. Ah—h! [*Ironically*] Poor lot, aren't they?

DICK. All right; chaff away, it's good fun, isn't it? It makes me sick to dance when Joy's lying there. Her last night, too!

MISS BEECH. [*Sidling to him*] You're a good young man, and you've got a good heart.

[*She takes his hand and puts it to her cheek.*]

DICK. Peachey—I say, Peachey—d'you think there's—I mean d'you think there'll ever be any chance for me?

MISS BEECH. I *thought* that was coming! I don't approve

of your making love at your time of life; don't you think I'm going to encourage you.

DICK. But I shall be of age in a year; my money's my own, it's not as if I had to ask anyone's leave; and I mean, I *do* know my own mind.

MISS BEECH. Of course you do. Nobody else would at your age, but *you* do.

DICK. I wouldn't ask her to promise, it wouldn't be fair when she's so young, but I do want her to know that I shall never change.

MISS BEECH. And suppose—only suppose—she's fond of you, and says *she'll* never change.

DICK. Oh! Peachey! D'you think there's a chance of that—*do* you?

MISS BEECH. A—h—h!

DICK. I wouldn't let her bind herself, I swear I wouldn't. [*Solemnly.*] I'm not such a selfish brute as you seem to think.

MISS BEECH. [*Sidling close to him and in a violent whisper*] Well—*have* a go!

DICK. Really? You *are* a brick, Peachey! [*He kisses her.*]

MISS BEECH. [*Yielding pleasurably; then remembering her principles*] Don't you ever say I said so! You're too young, both of you.

DICK. But it is exceptional, I mean in *my* case, isn't it?

[*The COLONEL and MRS. GWYN are coming down the lawn.*]

MISS BEECH. Oh! *very*!

[*She sits beneath the tree and fans herself.*]

COLONEL. The girls are all sitting out, Dick! I've been obliged to dance myself. Phew! [*He mops his brow.*]

[*DICK, swinging round, goes rushing off towards the house.*]
[*Looking after him.*] Hallo! What's the matter with him? Cooling your heels, Peachey? By George! it's hot. Fancy the poor devils in London on a night like this, what? [*He sees the moon.*] It's a full moon. You're lucky to be down here, Molly.

MRS. GWYN. [*In a low voice*] Very!

MISS BEECH. Oh! so you think she's lucky, do you?

COLONEL. [*Expanding his nostrils*] Delicious scent to-night! Hay and roses—delicious. [*He seats himself between them.*] A shame that poor child has knocked up like this. Don't think it was the sun myself—more likely neuralgic—she's subject to neuralgia, Molly.

MRS. GWYN. [*Motionless*] I know.

COLONEL. Got too excited about your coming. I told Nell not to keep worrying her about her frock, and this is the result. But your Aunt—you know—she can't let a thing alone!

MISS BEECH. Ah! 'tish't neuralgia.

[*MRS. GWYN looks at her quickly and averts her eyes.*]

COLONEL. Excitable little thing. You don't understand her, Peachey.

MISS BEECH. Don't I?

COLONEL. She's all affection. Eh, Molly? I remember what I was like at her age, a poor affectionate little rat, and now look at me!

MISS BEECH. [*Fanning herself*] I see you.

COLONEL. [*A little sadly*] We forget what we were like when we were young. She's been looking forward to to-night ever since you wrote; and now to have to go to bed and miss the dancing. Too bad!

MRS. GWYN. Don't, Uncle Tom!

COLONEL. [*Patting her hand*] There, there, old girl, don't think about it. She'll be all right to-morrow.

MISS BEECH. If I were her mother I'd soon have her up.

COLONEL. Have her up with that headache! What are you talking about, Peachey?

MISS BEECH. I know a remedy.

COLONEL. Well, out with it.

MISS BEECH. Oh! Molly knows it too!

MRS. GWYN. [*Staring at the ground*] It's easy to advise.

COLONEL. [*Fidgeting*] Well, if you're thinking of morphia for her, don't have anything to do with it. I've always set my face against morphia; the only time I took it was in Burmah.

I'd raging neuralgia for two days. I went to our old doctor, and I made him give me some. "Look here, doctor," I said, "I hate the idea of morphia, I've never taken it, and I never want to."

MISS BEECH. [*Looking at MRS. GWYN*] When a tooth hurts, you should have it out. It's only putting off the evil day.

COLONEL. You say that because it wasn't your own.

MISS BEECH. Well, it was hollow, and you broke your principles!

COLONEL. Hollow yourself, Peachey; you're as bad as anyone!

MISS BEECH. [*With devilry*] Well, I know that! [*She turns to MRS. GWYN.*] He should have had it out! Shouldn't he, Molly?

MRS. GWYN. I—don't—judge for other people.

[*She gets up suddenly, as though deprived of air.*]

COLONEL. [*Alarmed*] Hallo, Molly! Aren't you feeling the thing, old girl?

MISS BEECH. Let her get some air, poor creature!

COLONEL. [*Who follows anxiously*] Your Aunt's got some first-rate sal volatile.

MRS. GWYN. It's all right, Uncle Tom. I felt giddy, it's nothing now.

COLONEL. That's the dancing. [*He taps his forehead.*] I know what it is when you're not used to it.

MRS. GWYN. [*With a sudden bitter outburst*] I suppose you think I'm a very bad mother to be amusing myself while Joy's suffering.

COLONEL. My dear girl, whatever put such a thought into your head? We all know if there were anything you *could* do, you'd do it at once, wouldn't she, Peachey?

[*MISS BEECH turns a slow look on MRS. GWYN.*]

MRS. GWYN. Ah! you see, Peachey knows me better.

COLONEL. [*Following up his thoughts*] I always think women are wonderful. There's your Aunt, she's very funny, but if there's anything the matter with me, she'll sit up all night; but

when she's ill herself, and you try to do anything for her, out she raps at once.

MRS. GWYN. [*In a low voice*] There's always *one* that a woman will do anything for.

COLONEL. Exactly what I say. With your Aunt it's me, and by George! Molly, sometimes I wish it wasn't.

MISS BEECH. [*With meaning*] But is it ever for another woman!

COLONEL. You old cynic! D'you mean to say Joy wouldn't do anything on earth for her Mother, or Molly for Joy? You don't know human nature. What a wonderful night! Haven't seen such a moon for years, she's like a great, great lamp! [MRS. GWYN *hiding from* MISS BEECH's eyes, rises and slips her arm through his; they stand together looking at the moon.] Don't like these Chinese lanterns, with that moon—tawdry! eh! By Jove, Molly, I sometimes think we humans are a rubbishy lot—each of us talking and thinking of nothing but our own potty little affairs, and when you see a great thing like that up there—— [*Sighs.*] But there's your Aunt, if I were to say a thing like that to her she'd—she'd think me a lunatic; and yet, you know, she's a *very good* woman.

MRS. GWYN. [*Half clinging to him*] Do you think me very selfish, Uncle Tom?

COLONEL. My dear—what a fancy! Think you selfish—of course I don't; why should I?

MRS. GWYN. [*Dully*] I don't know.

COLONEL. [*Changing the subject nervously*] I like your friend, Lever, Molly. He came to me before dinner quite distressed about your Aunt, beggin' me not to take those shares. She'll be the first to worry me, but he made such a point of it, poor chap—in the end I was obliged to say I wouldn't. I thought it showed very nice feeling. [*Ruefully.*] It's a pretty tight fit to make two ends meet on my income—I've missed a good thing, all owing to your Aunt. [*Dropping his voice.*] I don't mind telling you, Molly, I think they've got a much finer mine there than they've any idea of. [MRS. GWYN gives way to

laughter that is very near to sobs.] [*With dignity*] I can't see what there is to laugh at.

MRS. GWYN. I don't know what's the matter with me this evening.

MISS BEECH. [*In a low voice*] I do.

COLONEL. There, there! Give me a kiss, old girl. [*He kisses her on the brow.*] Why, you're forehead's as hot as fire, I know—I know—you're fretting about Joy. Never mind—come! [*He draws her hand beneath his arm.*] Let's go and have a look at the moon on the river. We all get upset at times; eh! [*Lifting his hand as if he had been stung.*] Why, you're not crying, Molly! I say! Don't do that, old girl, it makes me wretched. Look here, Peachey. [*Holding out the hand on which the tear had dropped.*] This is dreadful!

MRS. GWYN. [*With a violent effort*] It's all right, Uncle Tom!

[*MISS BEECH wipes her own eyes stealthily. From the house is heard the voice of MRS. HOPE, calling "TOM."*]

MISS BEECH. Someone calling you!

COLONEL. There, there, my dear, you just stay here, and cool yourself—I'll come back—shan't be a minute. [*He turns to go.*] [*MRS. HOPE'S voice sounds nearer.*] [*Turning back.*] And, Molly, old girl, don't you mind anything I said. I don't remember what it was—it must have been something, I suppose. [*He hastily retreats.*]

MRS. GWYN. [*In a fierce low voice*] Why do you torture me?

MISS BEECH. [*Sadly*] I don't want to torture you.

MRS. GWYN. But you do. D'you think I haven't seen this coming—all these weeks. I knew she must find out some time! But even a day counts——

MISS BEECH. I don't understand why you brought him down here.

MRS. GWYN. [*After staring at her, bitterly*] When day after day and night after night you've thought of nothing but how to keep them both, you might a little want to prove that it was possible, mightn't you? But *you don't* understand—how

should you? You've never been a mother! [*And fiercely*]
You've never had a lov——

[*MISS BEECH raises her face—it is all puckered.*]
[*Impulsively.*] Oh, I didn't mean that, Peachey!

MISS BEECH. All right, my dear.

MRS. GWYN. I'm so dragged in two. [*She sinks into a chair.*] I knew it must come.

MISS BEECH. Does she know everything, Molly?

MRS. GWYN. She guesses.

MISS BEECH. [*Mournfully*] It's either him or her then, my dear; one or the other you'll have to give up.

MRS. GWYN. [*Motionless*] Life's very hard on women?

MISS BEECH. Life's only just beginning for that child, Molly.

MRS. GWYN. You don't care if it ends for *me*!

MISS BEECH. Is it as bad as that?

MRS. GWYN. Yes.

MISS BEECH. [*Rocking her body*] Poor things! Poor things!

MRS. GWYN. Are you still fond of me?

MISS BEECH. Yes, yes, my dear, of course I am.

MRS. GWYN. In spite of my—wickedness? [*She laughs.*]

MISS BEECH. Who am I to tell what's wicked and what isn't? God knows you're both like daughters to me.

MRS. GWYN. [*Abruptly*] I can't.

MISS BEECH. Molly.

MRS. GWYN. You don't know what you're asking.

MISS BEECH. If I could save you suffering, my dear, I would. I hate suffering, if it's only a fly, I hate it.

MRS. GWYN. [*Turning away from her*] Life isn't fair. Peachey, go in and leave me alone. [*She leans back motionless.*]

[*MISS BEECH gets off her seat, and stroking MRS. GWYN's arm in passing goes silently away. In the opening of the wall she meets LEVER, who is looking for his partner. They make way for each other.*]

LEVER. [*Going up to MRS. GWYN—gravely*] The next is our dance, Molly.

MRS. GWYN. [*Unmoving*] Let's sit it out here, then.

[*LEVER sits down.*]

LEVER. I've made it all right with your Uncle.

MRS. GWYN. [*Dully*] Oh?

LEVER. I spoke to him about the shares before dinner.

MRS. GWYN. Yes, he told me, thank you.

LEVER. There's nothing to worry over, dear.

MRS. GWYN. [*Passionately*] What does it matter about the wretched shares *now*? I'm stifling. [*She throws her scarf off.*]

LEVER. I don't understand what you mean by "now."

MRS. GWYN. Don't you?

LEVER. We weren't—Joy can't *know*—why should she? I don't believe for a minute——

MRS. GWYN. Because you don't want to.

LEVER. Do you mean she does?

MRS. GWYN. Her heart knows. [*LEVER makes a movement of discomfiture; suddenly MRS. GWYN looks at him as though to read his soul.*] I seem to bring you nothing but worry, Maurice. Are you tired of me?

LEVER. [*Meeting her eyes*] No, I am not.

MRS. GWYN. Ah, but would you tell me if you were?

LEVER. [*Softly*] Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.

[*MRS. GWYN struggles to look at him, then covers her face with her hands.*]

MRS. GWYN. If I were to give you up, you'd forget me in a month.

LEVER. Why do you say such things?

MRS. GWYN. If only I could believe I was necessary to you!

LEVER. [*Forcing the fervour of his voice*] But you *are*!

MRS. GWYN. Am I? [*With the ghost of a smile.*] Midsummer day! [*She gives a laugh that breaks into a sob.*]

[*The music of a waltz sounds from the house.*]

LEVER. For God's sake, don't, Molly—I don't believe in going to meet trouble.

MRS. GWYN. It's staring me in the face.

LEVER. Let the future take care of itself! [*MRS. GWYN*

has turned away her face, covering it with her hands.] Don't, Molly! *[Trying to pull her hands away.]* Don't!

MRS. GWYN. Oh! what shall I do? *[There is a silence; the music of the waltz sounds louder from the house.]* *[Starting up.]* Listen! One can't sit it out and dance it too. Which is it to be, Maurice, dancing—or sitting out? It must be one or the other, mustn't it?

LEVER. Molly! Molly!

MRS. GWYN. Ah, my dear! *[Standing away from him as though to show herself.]* How long shall I keep you? This is all that's left of me. It's time I joined the wallflowers. *[Smiling faintly.]* It's time I played the mother, isn't it? *[In a whisper.]* It'll be all sitting out then.

LEVER. Don't! Let's go and dance, it'll do you good.

[He puts his hands on her arms, and in a gust of passion kisses her lips and throat.]

MRS. GWYN. I can't give you up—I can't. Love me, oh! love me!

[For a moment they stand so; then, with sudden remembrance of where they are, they move apart.]

LEVER. Are you all right now, darling?

MRS. GWYN. *[Trying to smile]* Yes, dear—quite.

LEVER. Then let's go, and dance. *[They go.]*

[For a few seconds the hollow tree stands alone; then from the house ROSE comes and enters it. She takes out a bottle of champagne, wipes it, and carries it away; but seeing MRS. GWYN'S scarf lying across the chair, she fingers it, and stops, listening to the waltz. Suddenly draping it round her shoulders, she seizes the bottle of champagne, and waltzes with abandon to the music, as though avenging a long starvation of her instincts. Thus dancing, she is surprised by DICK, who has come to smoke a cigarette and think, at the spot where he was told to "have a go." ROSE, startled, stops and hugs the bottle.]

DICK. It's not claret, Rose, I shouldn't warm it.

[ROSE, taking off the scarf, replaces it on the chair; then with the half-warmed bottle, she retreats. DICK, in the swing, sits

thinking of his fate. Suddenly from behind the hollow tree he sees JOY darting forward in her day dress with her hair about her neck, and her skirt all torn. As he springs towards her she turns at bay.

DICK. Joy!

JOY. I want Uncle Tom.

DICK. [*In consternation*] But ought you to have got up—I thought you were ill in bed; oughtn't you to be lying down?

JOY. I haven't *been* in bed. Where's Uncle Tom?

DICK. But where have you been—your dress is all torn? Look!

[*He touches the torn skirt.*]

JOY. [*Tearing it away*] In the fields. Where's Uncle Tom?

DICK. Aren't you really ill, then? [*JOY shakes her head.*]

DICK, *showing her the irises.*] Look at these. 'They were the best I could get!

JOY. Don't! I want Uncle Tom!

DICK. Won't you take them?

JOY. I've got something else to do.

DICK. [*With sudden resolution*] What do you want the Colonel for?

JOY. I want him.

DICK. Alone?

JOY. Yes.

DICK. Joy, what *is* the matter?

JOY. I've got something to tell him.

DICK. What? [*With sudden inspiration*] Is it about Lever?

JOY. [*In a low voice*] The mine.

DICK. The mine?

JOY. It's not—not a proper one.

DICK. How do you mean, Joy?

JOY. I overheard. I don't care, I listened. I wouldn't if it had been anybody else, but I *hate* him.

DICK. [*Gravely*] What did you hear?

JOY. He's keeping back something Uncle Tom ought to know.

DICK. Are you sure? [*JOY makes a rush to pass him.*]

[*Barring the way.*] No, wait a minute—you must! Was it something that really matters, I don't want to know what.

JOY. Yes, it was.

DICK. What a beastly thing—are you quite certain, Joy?

JOY. [*Between her teeth*] Yes.

DICK. Then you *must* tell him, of course, even if you did overhear. You can't stand by and see the Colonel swindled. Whom was he talking to?

JOY. I won't tell you.

DICK. [*Taking her wrist*] Was it—was it your Mother?
[*Joy bends her head.*] But if it was your Mother, why doesn't she——

JOY. Let me go.

DICK. [*Still holding her*] I mean I can't see what——

JOY. [*Passionately*] Let me go!

DICK. [*Releasing her*] I'm thinking of your Mother, Joy. She would never——

JOY. [*Covering her face*] That man!

DICK. But, Joy, just think! There must be some mistake. It's so queer—it's *quite impossible*!

JOY. He won't let her.

DICK. Won't let her—won't *let* her? But—— [*Stopping dead, and in a very different voice*] Oh!

JOY. [*Passionately*] Why d'you look at me like that? Why can't you speak? [*She waits for him to speak, but he does not.*] I'm going to show what he is, so that Mother shan't speak to him again. I can—can't I—if I tell Uncle Tom?—can't I——?

DICK. But, Joy—if your Mother knows a thing like—that——

JOY. She wanted to tell—she begged him—and he wouldn't.

DICK. But, Joy, dear, it means——

JOY. I hate him, I want to make her hate him, and I *will*.

DICK. But, Joy, dear, don't you see—if your Mother knows a thing like that, and doesn't speak of it, it means that she—it means that you can't *make* her hate him—it means—— If it

were anybody else, but, well, you can't give *your own Mother* away!

JOY. How dare you! How *dare* you! [*Turning to the hollow tree.*] It isn't true—— Oh! it *isn't* true?

DICK. [*In deep distress*] Joy, dear, I never meant, I didn't really! [*He tries to pull her hands down from her face.*]

JOY. [*Suddenly*] Oh! go away, go away!

[*MRS. GWYN is seen coming back. JOY springs into the tree. DICK quickly steals away. MRS. GWYN goes up to the chair and takes the scarf that she has come for, and is going again when JOY steals out to her.*]

Mother! [*MRS. GWYN stands looking at her with her teeth set on her lower lip.*] Oh! Mother, it isn't true?

MRS. GWYN. [*Very still*] What isn't true?

JOY. That you and he are—— [*Searching her Mother's face, which is deadly still. In a whisper*] Then it is true. Oh!

MRS. GWYN. That's enough, Joy! What *I* am is my affair—not *yours*—do you understand?

JOY. [*Low and fierce*] Yes, I *do*.

MRS. GWYN. You don't. You're only a child.

JOY. [*Passionately*] I understand that you've hurt——

[*She stops.*]

MRS. GWYN. Do you mean your father?

JOY. [*Bowing her head*] Yes, and—and me. [*She covers her face.*] I'm—I'm ashamed.

MRS. GWYN. I brought you into the world, and you say that to me? Have I been a bad mother to you?

JOY. [*In a smothered voice*] Oh! Mother!

MRS. GWYN. Ashamed? Am *I* to live all my life like a dead woman because you're ashamed? Am *I* to live like the dead because you're a child that knows nothing of life? Listen, Joy, you'd better understand this once for all. Your Father has no right over me and he knows it. We've been hateful to each other for years. *Can* you understand that? Don't cover your face like a child—look at me. [*JOY drops her hands, and lifts her face. MRS. GWYN looks back at her, her lips*

are quivering; she goes on speaking with stammering rapidity.]
D'you think—because I suffered when you were born and because I've suffered since with every ache you ever had, that that gives you the right to dictate to me now? [*In a dead voice*] I've been unhappy enough and I shall be unhappy enough in the time to come. [*Meeting the hard wonder in Joy's face.*] Oh! you untouched things, you're as hard and cold as iron.

JOY. I would do anything for *you*, Mother.

MRS. GWYN. Except—let me live, Joy. That's the only thing you won't do for me, I quite understand.

JOY. Oh! Mother, you *don't* understand—I *want* you so; and I seem to be nothing to you now.

MRS. GWYN. Nothing to me? [*She smiles.*]

JOY. Mother, darling, if you're so unhappy let's forget it all, let's go away and I'll be everything to you, I promise.

MRS. GWYN. [*With a ghost of a laugh*] Ah, Joy!

JOY. I would try so hard.

MRS. GWYN. [*With the same quivering smile*] My darling, I know you would, until you fell in love yourself.

JOY. Oh, Mother, I wouldn't, I never would, I swear it.

MRS. GWYN. There has never been a woman, Joy, that did not fall in love.

JOY. [*In a despairing whisper*] But it's wrong of you—it's wicked!

MRS. GWYN. If it's wicked, I shall pay for it, not *you*!

JOY. But I want to save you, Mother!

MRS. GWYN. Save me? [*Breaking into laughter.*]

JOY. I can't bear it that *you*—if you'll only—I'll never leave you. You think I don't know what I'm saying, but I *do*, because even now I—I half love somebody. Oh, Mother! [*Pressing her breast.*] I feel—I feel so awful—as if everybody knew.

MRS. GWYN. You think I'm a monster to hurt you. Ah! yes. You'll understand better some day.

JOY. [*In a sudden outburst of excited fear*] I won't believe it—I—I—can't—you're *deserting* me, Mother.

MRS. GWYN. Oh, you untouched things! You——

[JOY looks up suddenly, sees her face, and sinks down on her knees.

JOY. Mother—it's for me!

MRS. GWYN. Ask for my life, Joy—don't be afraid!

[JOY turns her face away. MRS. GWYN bends suddenly and touches her daughter's hair; JOY shrinks from that touch.]

[Recoiling as though she had been stung.] I forgot—I'm deserting you.

[And swiftly without looking back she goes away. JOY, left alone under the hollow tree, crouches lower, and her shoulders shake. Here DICK finds her, when he hears no longer any sound of voices. He falls on his knees beside her.

DICK. Oh! Joy, dear, don't cry. It's so dreadful to see you! I'd do anything not to see you cry. Say something. [JOY is still for a moment, then the shaking of the shoulders begins again.] Joy, darling! It's so awful, you'll make yourself ill, and it isn't worth it really. I'd do anything to save you pain—won't you stop just for a minute? [JOY is still again.] Nothing in the world's worth your crying, Joy. Give me just a little look.

JOY. [Looking; in a smothered voice] Don't.

DICK. You do look so sweet! Oh, Joy! I'll comfort you, I'll take it all on myself. I know all about it. [JOY gives a sobbing laugh.] I do. I've had trouble too, I swear I have. It gets better, it does really.

JOY. You don't know—it's—it's——

DICK. Don't think about it! No, no, no! I know exactly what it's like.

[He strokes her arm.

JOY. [Shrinking, in a whisper] You mustn't.

[The music of a waltz is heard again.

DICK. Look here, Joy! It's no good, we must talk it over calmly.

JOY. You don't see! It's the—it's the disgrace——

DICK. Oh! as to disgrace—she's your Mother, whatever she does; I'd like to see anybody say anything about her—[viciously]—I'd punch his head.

JOY. [*Gulping her tears*] That doesn't help.

DICK. But if she doesn't love your Father——

JOY. But she's *married* to him!

DICK. [*Hastily*] Yes, of course, I know, marriage is awfully important; but a man understands these things. [*Joy looks at him. Seeing the impression he has made, he tries again.*] I mean, he understands better than a woman. I've often argued about moral questions with men up at Oxford.

JOY. [*Catching at a straw*] But there's nothing to argue about.

DICK. [*Hastily*] Of course, *I* believe in morals. [*They stare solemnly at each other.*] Some men don't. But *I* can't help seeing marriage is awfully important.

JOY. [*Solemnly*] It's sacred.

DICK. Yes, I know, but there must be exceptions, Joy.

JOY. [*Losing herself a little in the stress of this discussion*] How can there be exceptions if a thing's sacred?

DICK. [*Earnestly*] All rules have exceptions; that's true, you know; it's a proverb.

JOY. It can't be true about marriage—how can it when——?

DICK. [*With intense earnestness*] But look here, Joy. I know a really clever man—an author. He says that if marriage is a failure people ought to be perfectly free; it isn't everybody who believes that marriage is everything. Of course, *I* believe it's sacred, but if it's a failure, I *do* think it seems awful—don't you?

JOY. I don't know—yes—if—— [*Suddenly*] But *it's my own Mother!*

DICK. [*Gravely*] I know, of course. I can't expect *you* to see it in *your own case* like this. [*With desperation*] But look here, Joy, this'll show you! If a person loves a person, they have to decide, haven't they? Well, then, you see, that's what your Mother's done.

JOY. But that doesn't show me anything!

DICK. But it does. The thing is to look at it as if it wasn't

yourself. If it had been you and me in love, Joy, and it was wrong, like them, of course [*ruefully*] I know you'd have decided right. [*Fiercely*] But I swear I should have decided wrong. [*Triumphantly*] That's why I feel I understand your Mother.

JOY. [*Brushing her sleeve across her eyes*] Oh, Dick, you are so sweet—and—and—funny!

DICK. [*Sliding his arm about her*] I love you, Joy, that's why, and I'll love you till you don't feel it any more. I will. I'll love you all day and every day; you shan't miss anything, I swear it. It's such a beautiful night—it's on purpose. Look! [*Joy looks; he looks at her.*] But it's not so beautiful as you.

JOY. [*Bending her head*] You mustn't. I don't know—what's coming.

DICK. [*Sidling closer*] Aren't your knees tired, darling? I—I can't get near you properly.

JOY. [*With a sob*] Oh! Dick, you are a funny—comfort!

DICK. We'll stick together, Joy, always; nothing'll matter then. [*They struggle to their feet—the waltz sounds louder.*] You're missing it all! I can't bear you to miss the dancing. It seems so queer! Couldn't we? Just a *little turn*?

JOY. No, no!

DICK. Oh! try!

[*He takes her gently by the waist, she shrinks back.*]

JOY. [*Brokenly*] No—no! Oh! Dick—to-morrow'll be so awful.

DICK. To-morrow shan't hurt you, Joy; nothing shall ever hurt you again.

[*She looks at him, and her face changes; suddenly she buries it against his shoulder.*]

[*They stand so just a moment in the moonlight; then turning to the river move slowly out of sight. Again the hollow tree is left alone. The music of the waltz has stopped. The voices of Miss BEECH and the COLONEL are heard approaching from the house. They appear in the opening of the wall. The COLONEL carries a pair of field-glasses with which to look at the moon.*]

COLONEL. Charming to see Molly dance with Lever, their

steps go so well together! I can always tell when a woman's enjoying herself, Peachey.

MISS BEECH. [*Sharply*] Can you? You're *very* clever.

COLONEL. Wonderful, that moon! I'm going to have a look at her! Splendid glasses these, Peachey [*he screws them out*], not a better pair in England. I remember in Burmah with these glasses I used to be able to tell a man from a woman at two miles and a quarter. And that's no joke, I can tell you. [*But on his way to the moon, he has taken a survey of the earth to the right along the river. In a low but excited voice*] I say, I say—is it one of the maids?—the baggage! Why! It's Dick! By George, she's got her hair down, Peachey! It's Joy! [*MISS BEECH goes to look. He makes as though to hand the glasses to her, but puts them to his own eyes instead—excitedly.*] It is! What about her headache? By George, they're kissing. I say, Peachey! I shall have to tell Nell!

MISS BEECH. Are you sure they're kissing? Well, that's some comfort.

COLONEL. They're at the stile now. Oughtn't I to stop them, eh? [*He stands on tiptoe.*] We mustn't spy on them, dash it all. [*He drops the glasses.*] They're out of sight now.

MISS BEECH. [*To herself*] He said he wouldn't let her.

COLONEL. *What!* Have you been encouraging them?

MISS BEECH. Don't be in such a hurry!

[*She moves towards the hollow tree.*]

COLONEL. [*Abstractedly*] By George, Peachey, to think that Nell and I were once—Poor Nell! I remember just such a night as this—— [*He stops, and stares before him, sighing.*]

MISS BEECH. [*Impressively*] It's a comfort she's got that good young man. She's found out that her mother and this Mr. Lever are—you know.

COLONEL. [*Losing all traces of his fussiness, and drawing himself up as though he were on parade*] You tell me that my niece——?

MISS BEECH. Out of her own mouth!

COLONEL. [*Bowing his head*] I never would have believed she'd have forgotten herself.

MISS BEECH. [*Very solemnly*] Ah, my dear! We're all the same; we're all as hollow as that tree! When it's ourselves it's always a *special case*! [*The COLONEL makes a movement of distress, and MISS BEECH goes to him.*] Don't you take it so to heart, my dear! [*A silence.*]

COLONEL. [*Shaking his head*] I couldn't have believed Molly would forget that child.

MISS BEECH. [*Sadly*] They must go their own ways, poor things! She can't put herself in the child's place, and the child can't put herself in Molly's. A woman and a girl—there's the tree of life between them!

COLONEL. [*Staring into the tree to see indeed if that were the tree alluded to*] It's a grief to me, Peachey, it's a grief! [*He sinks into a chair, stroking his long moustaches. Then to avenge his hurt*] Shan't tell Nell—dashed if I do anything to make the trouble worse!

MISS BEECH. [*Nodding*] There's suffering enough, without adding to it with our trumpery judgments! If only things would last between them!

COLONEL. [*Fiercely*] Last! By George, they'd better—— [*He stops, and looking up with a queer sorry look*] I say, Peachey—*Life's very funny*!

MISS BEECH. Men and women are! [*Touching his forehead tenderly.*] There, there—take care of your poor, dear head! Tstt! The blessed innocents!

[*She pulls the COLONEL's sleeve. They slip away towards the house, as JOY and DICK come back. They are still linked together, and stop by the hollow of the tree.*]

JOY. [*In a whisper*] Dick, is love always like this!

DICK. [*Putting his arms round her, with conviction*] *It's never been like this before. It's you and me!*

[*He kisses her on the lips.*]

The curtain falls.

ACT III

It is five o'clock. In the UNDERWOODS' drawing-room, which is artistically furnished, ENID is sitting on the sofa working at a baby's frock. EDGAR, by a little spindle-legged table in the centre of the room, is fingering a china-box. His eyes are fixed on the double doors that lead into the dining-room.

EDGAR. [*Putting down the china-box, and glancing at his watch*] Just on five, they're all in there waiting, except Frank. Where's he?

ENID. He's had to go down to Gasgoyne's about a contract. Will you want him?

EDGAR. He can't help us. This is a directors' job. [*Motioning towards a single door half hidden by a curtain.*] Father in his room?

ENID. Yes.

EDGAR. I wish he'd stay there, Enid. [*ENID looks up at him.*] This is a beastly business, old girl.

[*He takes up the little box again and turns it over and over.*

ENID. I went to the Roberts's this afternoon, 'T'ed.

EDGAR. That wasn't very wise.

ENID. He's simply killing his wife.

EDGAR. We are, you mean.

ENID. [*Suddenly*] Roberts *ought* to give way!

EDGAR. There's a lot to be said on the men's side.

ENID. I don't feel half so sympathetic with them as I did before I went. They just set up class feeling against you. Poor Annie was looking dreadfully bad—fire going out, and nothing fit for her to eat. [*EDGAR walks to and fro.*] But she would stand up for Roberts. When you see all this wretchedness going on and feel you can do nothing, you have to shut your eyes to the whole thing.

EDGAR. If you can.

ENID. When I went I was all on their side, but as soon as I got there I began to feel quite different at once. People talk about sympathy with the working classes, they don't know what it means to try and put it into practice. It seems hopeless.

EDGAR. Ah! well.

ENID. It's dreadful going on with the men in this state. I do hope the Dad will make concessions.

EDGAR. He won't. [*Gloomily.*] It's a sort of religion with him. Curse it! I know what's coming! He'll be voted down.

ENID. They wouldn't dare!

EDGAR. They will—they're in a funk.

ENID. [*Indignantly*] He'd never stand it!

EDGAR. [*With a shrug*] My dear girl, if you're beaten in a vote, you've got to stand it.

ENID. Oh! [*She gets up in alarm.*] But would he resign?

EDGAR. Of course! It goes to the roots of his beliefs.

ENID. But he's so *wrapped up in this company*, Ted! There'd be nothing left for him! It'd be dreadful! [*EDGAR shrugs his shoulders.*] Oh, Ted, he's so old now! You mustn't let them!

EDGAR. [*Hiding his feelings in an outburst*] My sympathies in this strike are all on the side of the men.

ENID. He's been Chairman for more than thirty years! He made the whole thing! And think of the bad times they've had, it's always been he who pulled them through. Oh, Ted, you must——

EDGAR. What is it you want? You said just now you hoped he'd make concessions. Now you want me to back him in not making them. This isn't a game, Enid!

ENID. [*Hotly*] It isn't a game to *me* that the Dad's in danger of losing all he cares about in life. If he won't give way, and he's beaten, it'll simply break him down!

EDGAR. Didn't you say it was dreadful going on with the men in this state?

ENID. But can't you see, Ted, Father'll never get over it!

You must stop them somehow. The others are afraid of him. If you back him up——

EDGAR. [*Putting his hand to his head*] Against my convictions—against yours! The moment it begins to pinch one personally——

ENID. It isn't personal, it's the Dad!

EDGAR. Your family or yourself, and over goes the show!

ENID. [*Resentfully*] If you don't take it seriously, I do.

EDGAR. I am as fond of him as you are; that's nothing to do with it.

ENID. We can't tell about the men; it's all guess-work. But we know the Dad might have a stroke any day. D'you mean to say that he isn't more to you than——

EDGAR. Of course he is.

ENID. I don't understand you then.

EDGAR. H'm!

ENID. If it were for oneself it would be different, but for our own Father! You don't seem to realize.

EDGAR. I realize perfectly.

ENID. It's your first duty to save him.

EDGAR. I wonder.

ENID. [*Imploring*] Oh, Ted! It's the only interest he's got left; it'll be like a death-blow to him!

EDGAR. [*Restraining his emotion*] I know.

ENID. Promise!

EDGAR. I'll do what I can. [*He turns to the double doors.*

[*The curtained door is opened, and ANTHONY appears.*

EDGAR opens the double doors, and passes through.

[*SCANTLEBURY'S voice is faintly heard: "Past five; we shall never get through—have to eat another dinner at that hotel!" The doors are shut. ANTHONY walks forward.*

ANTHONY. You've been seeing Roberts, I hear.

ENID. Yes.

ANTHONY. Do you know what trying to bridge such a gulf as this is like? [*ENID puts her work on the little table, and faces him.*] Filling a sieve with sand!

ENID. Don't!

ANTHONY. You think with your gloved hands you can cure the trouble of the century. [*He passes on.*]

ENID. Father! [*ANTHONY stops at the double doors.*] I'm only thinking of you!

ANTHONY. [*More softly*] I can take care of myself, my dear.

ENID. Have you thought what'll happen if you're beaten — [*she points*] — in there?

ANTHONY. I don't mean to be.

ENID. Oh! Father, don't give them a chance. You're not well; need you go to the meeting at all?

ANTHONY. [*With a grim smile*] Cut and run?

ENID. But they'll outvote you!

ANTHONY. [*Putting his hand on the doors*] We shall see!

ENID. I beg you, Dad! [*ANTHONY looks at her softly.*]
Won't you? [*ANTHONY shakes his head. He opens the doors. A buzz of voices comes in.*]

SCANTLEBURY. Can one get dinner on that 6.30 train up?

TENCH. No, sir, I believe not, sir.

WILDER. Well, I shall speak out; I've had enough of this.

EDGAR. [*Sharply*] What?

[*It ceases instantly. ANTHONY passes through, closing the doors behind him. ENID springs to them with a gesture of dismay. She puts her hand on the knob, and begins turning it; then goes to the fireplace, and taps her foot on the fender. Suddenly she rings the bell. FROST comes in by the door that leads into the hall.*]

FROST. Yes, M'm?

ENID. When the men come, Frost, please show them in here; the hall's cold.

FROST. I could put them in the pantry, M'm.

ENID. No. I don't want to—to offend them; they're so touchy.

FROST. Yes, M'm. [*Pause.*] Excuse me, Mr. Anthony's 'ad nothing to eat all day.

ENID. I know, Frost.

FROST. Nothin' but two whiskies and sodas, M'm.

ENID. Oh! you oughtn't to have let him have those.

FROST. [*Gravely*] Mr. Anthony is a little difficult, M'm. It's not as if he were a younger man, an' knew what was good for 'im; he will have his own way.

ENID. I suppose we all want that.

FROST. Yes, M'm. [*Quietly.*] Excuse me speakin' about the strike. I'm sure if the other gentlemen were to give up to Mr. Anthony, and quietly let the men 'ave what they want, afterwards, that'd be the best way. I find that very useful with him at times, M'm. [*ENID shakes her head.*] If he's crossed, it makes him violent [*with an air of discovery*], and I've noticed in my own case, when I'm violent I'm always sorry for it afterwards.

ENID. [*With a smile*] Are you ever violent, Frost?

FROST. Yes, M'm; oh! sometimes very violent.

ENID. I've never seen you.

FROST. [*Impersonally*] No, M'm; that is so.

[*ENID fidgets towards the door's back.*]
[*With feeling.*] Bein' with Mr. Anthony, as you know, M'm, ever since I was fifteen, it worries me to see him crossed like this at his age. I've taken the liberty to speak to Mr. Wanklin [*dropping his voice*]*—seems to be the most sensible of the gentlemen—but 'e said to me: "That's all very well, Frost, but this strike's a very serious thing," 'e said. "Serious for all parties, no doubt," I said, "but yummour 'im, sir," I said, "yummour 'im. It's like this, if a man comes to a stone wall, 'e doesn't drive 'is 'ead against it, 'e gets over it." "Yes," 'e said, "you'd better tell your master that."* [*FROST looks at his nails.*] That's where it is, M'm. I said to Mr. Anthony this morning: "Is it worth it, sir?" "Damn it," he said to me, "Frost! Mind your own business, or take a month's notice!" Beg pardon, M'm, for using such a word.

ENID. [*Moving to the double doors, and listening*] Do you know that man Roberts, Frost?

FROST. Yes, M'm; that's to say, not to speak to. But to look at 'im you can tell what *he's* like.

ENID. [*Stopping*] Yes?

FROST. He's not one of these 'ere ordinary 'armless Socialists. 'E's violent; got a fire inside 'im. What I call "personal." A man may 'ave what opinion 'e likes, so long as 'e's not personal; when 'e's that 'e's *not* safe.

ENID. I think that's what my Father feels about Roberts.

FROST. No doubt, M'm, Mr. Anthony has a feeling against him. [ENID glances at him sharply, but finding him in perfect earnest, stands biting her lips, and looking at the double doors.] It's a regular right down struggle between the two. I've no patience with this Roberts; from what I 'ear he's just an ordinary workin' man like the rest of 'em. If he did invent a thing he's no worse off than 'undreds of others. My brother invented a new kind o' dumb waiter—nobody gave *him* anything for it, an' there it is, bein' used all over the place. [ENID moves closer to the double doors.] There's a kind o' man that never forgives the world, because 'e wasn't born a gentleman. What I say is—no man that's a gentleman looks down on another man because 'e 'appens to be a class or two above 'im, no more than if 'e 'appens to be a class or two below.

ENID. [*With slight impatience*] Yes, I know, Frost, of course. Will you please go in and ask if they'll have some tea; say I sent you.

FROST. Yes, M'm. [*He opens the doors gently and goes in. There is a momentary sound of earnest, rather angry talk.*]

WILDER. I don't agree with you.

WANKLIN. We've had this over a dozen times.

EDGAR. [*Impatiently*] Well, what's the proposition?

SCANTLEBURY. Yes, what does your Father say? Tea? Not for me, not for me!

WANKLIN. What I understand the Chairman to say is this—— [FROST re-enters, closing the door behind him.]

ENID. [*Moving from the door*] Won't they have any tea, Frost? [*She goes to the little table, and remains motionless, looking at the baby's frock. A parlourmaid enters from the hall.*]

PARLOURMAID. A Miss Thomas, M'm.

ENID. [*Raising her head*] Thomas? What Miss Thomas—d'you mean a——?

PARLOURMAID. Yes, M'm.

ENID. [*Blankly*] Oh! Where is she?

PARLOURMAID. In the porch.

ENID. I don't want—— [*She hesitates.*]

FROST. Shall I dispose of her, M'm?

ENID. I'll come out. No, show her in here, Ellen.

[*The PARLOURMAID and FROST go out. ENID pursing her lips, sits at the little table, taking up the baby's frock. The PARLOURMAID ushers in MADGE THOMAS and goes out; MADGE stands by the door.*]

ENID. Come in. What is it? What have you come for, please?

MADGE. Brought a message from Mrs. Roberts.

ENID. A message? Yes.

MADGE. She asks you to look after her Mother.

ENID. I don't understand.

MADGE. [*Sullenly*] That's the message.

ENID. But—what—why?

MADGE. Annie Roberts is dead. [*There is a silence.*]

ENID. [*Horried*] But it's only a little more than an hour since I saw her.

MADGE. Of cold and hunger.

ENID. [*Rising*] Oh! that's not true! the poor thing's heart—— What makes you look at me like that? I tried to help her.

MADGE. [*With suppressed savagery*] I thought you'd like to know.

ENID. [*Passionately*] It's so unjust! Can't you see that I want to help you all?

MADGE. I never harmed anyone that hadn't harmed me first.

ENID. [*Coldly*] What harm have I done you? Why do you speak to me like that?

MADGE. [*With the bitterest intensity*] You come out of your

comfort to spy on us! A week of hunger, that's what you want!

ENID. [*Standing her ground*] Don't talk nonsense!

MADGE. I saw her die; her hands were blue with the cold.

ENID. [*With a movement of grief*] Oh! why wouldn't she let me help her? It's such senseless pride!

MADGE. Pride's better than nothing to keep your body warm.

ENID. [*Passionately*] I won't talk to you! How can you tell what I feel? It's not my fault that I was born better off than you.

MADGE. We don't want your money.

ENID. You don't understand, and you don't want to; please to go away!

MADGE. [*Balefully*] You've killed her, for all your soft words, you and your father——

ENID. [*With rage and emotion*] That's wicked! My father is suffering himself through this wretched strike.

MADGE. [*With sombre triumph*] Then tell him Mrs. Roberts is dead! That'll make him better.

ENID. Go away!

MADGE. When a person hurts us we get it back on them.

[*She makes a sudden and swift movement towards ENID, fixing her eyes on the child's frock lying across the little table. ENID snatches the frock up, as though it were the child itself. They stand a yard apart, crossing glances.*

MADGE. [*Pointing to the frock with a little smile*] Ah! You felt that! Lucky it's her mother—not her children—you've to look after, isn't it. *She won't trouble you long!*

ENID. Go away!

MADGE. I've given you the message.

[*She turns and goes out into the hall. ENID, motionless till she has gone, sinks down at the table, bending her head over the frock, which she is still clutching to her. The double doors are opened, and ANTHONY comes slowly in; he passes his daughter, and lowers himself into an armchair. He is very flushed.*

ENID. [*Hiding her emotion—anxiously*] What is it, Dad? [ANTHONY makes a gesture, but does not speak.] Who was it?

[ANTHONY does not answer. ENID going to the double doors meets EDGAR coming in. They speak together in low tones.]
What is it, Ted?

EDGAR. That fellow Wilder! Taken to personalities! He was downright insulting.

ENID. What did he say?

EDGAR. Said, Father was too old and feeble to know what he was doing! The Dad's worth six of him!

ENID. Of course he is. [They look at ANTHONY.

[The doors open wider, WANKLIN appears with SCANTLEBURY.

SCANTLEBURY. [Sotto voce] I don't like the look of this!

WANKLIN. [Going forward] Come, Chairman! Wilder sends you his apologies. A man can't do more.

[WILDER, followed by TENCH, comes in, and goes to ANTHONY.

WILDER. [Glumly] I withdraw my words, sir. I'm sorry.

[ANTHONY nods to him.

ENID. You haven't come to a decision, Mr. Wanklin?

[WANKLIN shakes his head.

WANKLIN. We're all here, Chairman; what do you say? Shall we get on with the business, or shall we go back to the other room?

SCANTLEBURY. Yes, yes; let's get on. We must settle something. [He turns from a small chair, and settles himself suddenly in the largest chair, with a sigh of comfort.

[WILDER and WANKLIN also sit; and TENCH, drawing up a straight-backed chair close to his Chairman, sits on the edge of it with the minute-book and a stylographic pen.

ENID. [Whispering] I want to speak to you a minute, Ted.

[They go out through the double doors.

WANKLIN. Really, Chairman, it's no use soothing ourselves with a sense of false security. If this strike's not brought to an end before the General Meeting, the shareholders will certainly haul us over the coals.

SCANTLEBURY. [Stirring] What—what's that?

WANKLIN. I know it for a fact.

ANTHONY. Let them!

WILDER. And get turned out?

WANKLIN. [*To ANTHONY*] I don't mind martyrdom for a policy in which I believe, but I object to being burnt for someone else's principles.

SCANTLEBURY. Very reasonable—you must see that, Chairman.

ANTHONY. We owe it to other employers to stand firm.

WANKLIN. There's a limit to that.

ANTHONY. You were all full of fight at the start.

SCANTLEBURY. [*With a sort of groan*] We thought the men would give in, but they—haven't!

ANTHONY. They will!

WILDER. [*Rising and pacing up and down*] I can't have my reputation as a man of business destroyed for the satisfaction of starving the men out. [*Almost in tears.*] I can't have it! How can we meet the shareholders with things in the state they are?

SCANTLEBURY. Hear, hear—hear, hear!

WILDER. [*Lashing himself*] If anyone expects me to say to them I've lost you fifty thousand pounds and sooner than put my pride in my pocket I'll lose you another— [*Glancing at ANTHONY.*] It's—it's unnatural! *I don't want to go against you, sir—*

WANKLIN. [*Persuasively*] Come, Chairman, we're *not* free agents. We're part of a machine. Our only business is to see the Company earns as much profit as it safely can. If you blame me for want of principle: I say that we're Trustees. Reason tells us we shall never get back in the saving of wages what we shall lose if we continue this struggle—really, Chairman, we *must* bring it to an end, on the best terms we can make.

ANTHONY. No! [*There is a pause of general dismay*

WILDER. It's a deadlock then. [*Letting his hands drop with a sort of despair.*] Now I shall never get off to Spain!

WANKLIN. [*Retaining a trace of irony*] You hear the consequences of your victory, Chairman?

WILDER. [*With a burst of feeling*] My wife's ill!

SCANTLEBURY. Dear, dear! You don't say so!

WILDER. If I don't get her out of this cold, I won't answer for the consequences.

[*Through the double doors EDGAR comes in looking very grave.*]

EDGAR. [*To his Father*] Have you heard this, sir? Mrs. Roberts is dead! [*Everyone stares at him, as if trying to gauge the importance of this news.*] Enid saw her this afternoon, she had no coals, or food, or anything. It's enough!

[*There is a silence, everyone avoiding the other's eyes, except ANTHONY, who stares hard at his son.*]

SCANTLEBURY. You don't suggest that we could have helped the poor thing?

WILDER. [*Flustered*] The woman was in bad health. Nobody can say there's any responsibility on us. At least—not on me.

EDGAR. [*Hotly*] I say that we *are* responsible.

ANTHONY. War is war!

EDGAR. Not on women!

WANKLIN. It not infrequently happens that women are the greatest sufferers.

EDGAR. If we knew that, all the more responsibility rests on us.

ANTHONY. This is no matter for amateurs.

EDGAR. Call me what you like, sir. It's sickened me. We had no right to carry things to such a length.

WILDER. I don't like this business a bit—that Radical rag will twist it to their own ends; see if they don't! They'll get up some cock-and-bull story about the poor woman's dying from starvation. I wash my hands of it.

EDGAR. You can't. None of us can.

SCANTLEBURY. [*Striking his fist on the arm of his chair*] But I protest against this——

EDGAR. Protest as you like, Mr. Scantlebury, it won't alter facts.

ANTHONY. That's enough.

EDGAR. [*Facing him angrily*] No, sir. I tell you exactly what I think. If we pretend the men are not suffering, it's hum-

bug; and if they're suffering, we know enough of human nature to know the women are suffering more, and as to the children—well—it's damnable! [SCANTLEBURY rises from his chair.] I don't say that we meant to be cruel, I don't say anything of the sort; but I do say it's criminal to shut our eyes to the facts. We employ these men, and we can't get out of it. I don't care so much about the men, but I'd sooner resign my position on the Board than go on starving women in this way.

[All except ANTHONY are now upon their feet, ANTHONY sits grasping the arms of his chair and staring at his son.]

SCANTLEBURY. I don't—I don't like the way you're putting it, young sir.

WANKLIN. You're rather overshooting the mark.

WILDER. I should think so indeed!

EDGAR. [Losing control] It's no use blinking things! If you want to have the death of women on your hands—I don't!

SCANTLEBURY. Now, now, young man!

WILDER. On *our* hands? Not on *mine*, I won't have it!

EDGAR. We are five members of this Board; if we were four against it, why did we let it drift till it came to this? You know perfectly well why—because we hoped we should starve the men out. Well, all we've done is to starve one woman out!

SCANTLEBURY. [Almost hysterically] I protest, I protest! I'm a humane man—we're all humane men!

EDGAR. [Scornfully] There's nothing wrong with our *humanity*. It's our imaginations, Mr. Scantlebury.

WILDER. Nonsense! My imagination's as good as yours.

EDGAR. If so, it isn't good enough.

WILDER. I foresaw this!

EDGAR. Then why didn't you put your foot down?

WILDER. Much good that would have done.

[He looks at ANTHONY.]

EDGAR. If you, and I, and each one of us here who say that our imaginations are so good——

SCANTLEBURY. [Flurried] I never said so.

EDGAR. [Paying no attention] ——had put our feet down,

the thing would have been ended long ago, and this poor woman's life wouldn't have been crushed out of her like this. For all we can tell there may be a dozen other starving women.

SCANTLEBURY. For God's sake, sir, don't use that word at a—at a Board meeting; it's—it's monstrous.

EDGAR. I *will* use it, Mr. Scantlebury.

SCANTLEBURY. Then I shall not listen to you. I shall not listen! It's painful to me. [*He covers his ears.*]

WANKLIN. None of us are opposed to a settlement, except your Father.

EDGAR. I'm certain that if the shareholders knew——

WANKLIN. I don't think you'll find their imaginations are any better than ours. Because a woman happens to have a weak heart——

EDGAR. A struggle like this finds out the weak spots in everybody. Any child knows that. If it hadn't been for this cut-throat policy, she needn't have died like this; and there wouldn't be all this misery that anyone who isn't a fool can see is going on. [*Throughout the foregoing ANTHONY has eyed his son; he now moves as though to rise, but stops as EDGAR speaks again.*] I don't defend the men, or myself, or anybody.

WANKLIN. You may have to! A coroner's jury of disinterested sympathizers may say some very nasty things. We mustn't lose sight of our position.

SCANTLEBURY. [*Without uncovering his ears*] Coroner's jury! No, no, it's not a case for that?

EDGAR. I've had enough of cowardice.

WANKLIN. Cowardice is an unpleasant word, Mr. Edgar Anthony. It will look very like cowardice if we suddenly concede the men's demands when a thing like this happens; we must be careful!

WILDER. Of course we must. We've no knowledge of this matter, except a rumour. The proper course is to put the whole thing into the hands of Harness to settle for us; that's natural, that's what we *should* have come to any way.

SCANTLEBURY. [*With dignity*] Exactly! [*Turning to*

EDGAR.] And as to you, young sir, I can't sufficiently express my—my distaste for the way you've treated the whole matter. You ought to withdraw! Talking of starvation, talking of cowardice! Considering what our views are! Except your own Father—we're all agreed the only policy is—is one of goodwill—it's most irregular, it's most improper, and all I can say is it's—it's given me pain——

[He places his hand on the centre of his scheme.]

EDGAR. *[Stubbornly]* I withdraw nothing.

[He is about to say more when SCANTLEBURY once more covers up his ears. TENCH suddenly makes a demonstration with the minute-book. A sense of having been engaged in the unusual comes over all of them, and one by one they resume their seats. EDGAR alone remains on his feet.]

WILDER. *[With an air of trying to wipe something out]* I pay no attention to what young Mr. Anthony has said. Coroner's Jury! The idea's preposterous. I—I move this amendment to the Chairman's Motion: That the dispute be placed at once in the hands of Mr. Simon Harness for settlement, on the lines indicated by him this morning. Anyone second that?

[TENCH writes in the book.]

WANKLIN. I do.

WILDER. Very well, then; I ask the Chairman to put it to the Board.

ANTHONY. *[With a great sigh—slowly]* We have been made the subject of an attack. *[Looking round at WILDER and SCANTLEBURY with ironical contempt.]* I take it on my shoulders. I am seventy-six years old. I have been Chairman of this Company since its inception two-and-thirty years ago. I have seen it pass through good and evil report. My connection with it began in the year that this young man was born. *[EDGAR bows his head.]* ANTHONY, *[gripping his chair, goes on.]* I have had to do with "men" for fifty years; I've always stood up to them; I have never been beaten yet. I have fought the men of this Company four times, and four times I have beaten them. It has been said that I am not the man I was. *[He looks*

at WILDER.] However that may be, I am man enough to stand to my guns.

[*His voice grows stronger. The double doors are opened. ENID slips in, followed by UNDERWOOD, who restrains her.*] The men have been treated justly, they have had fair wages, we have always been ready to listen to complaints. It has been said that times have changed; if they have, I have not changed with them. Neither will I. It has been said that masters and men are equal! Cant! There can only be one master in a house! Where two men meet the better man will rule. It has been said that Capital and Labour have the same interests. Cant! Their interests are as wide asunder as the poles. It has been said that the Board is only part of a machine. Cant! We *are* the machine; its brains and sinews; it is for us to lead and to determine what is to be done, and to do it without fear or favour. Fear of the men! Fear of the shareholders! Fear of our own shadows! Before I am like that, I hope to die. [*He pauses, and meeting his son's eyes, goes on.*] There is only one way of treating "men"—with *the iron hand*. This half-and-half business, the half-and-half manners of this generation has brought all this upon us. Sentiment and softness, and what this young man, no doubt, would call his social policy. You can't eat cake and have it! This middle-class sentiment, or socialism, or whatever it may be, is rotten. Masters are masters, men are men! Yield one demand, and they will make it six. They are [*he smiles grimly*] like Oliver Twist, asking for more. If I were in *their* place I should be the same. But I am not in their place. Mark my words: one fine morning, when you have given way here, and given way there—you will find you have parted with the ground beneath your feet, and are deep in the bog of bankruptcy; and with you, floundering in that bog, will be the very men you have given way to. I have been accused of being a domineering tyrant, thinking only of my pride—I am thinking of the future of this country, threatened with the black waters of confusion, threatened with mob government, threatened with what I cannot see. If by any

conduct of mine I help to bring this on us, I shall be ashamed to look my fellows in the face.

[ANTHONY stares before him, at what he cannot see, and there is perfect stillness. FROST comes in from the hall, and all but ANTHONY look round at him uneasily.]

FROST. [To his master] The men are here, sir. [ANTHONY makes a gesture of dismissal.] Shall I bring them in, sir?

ANTHONY. Wait! [FROST goes out, ANTHONY turns to face his son.] I come to the attack that has been made upon me. [EDGAR, with a gesture of deprecation, remains motionless with his head a little bowed.] A woman has died. I am told that her blood is on my hands; I am told that on my hands is the starvation and the suffering of other women and children.

EDGAR. I said "on our hands," sir.

ANTHONY. It is the same. [His voice grows stronger and stronger, his feeling is more and more made manifest.] I am not aware that if my adversary suffer in a fair fight not sought by me, it is my fault. If I fall under his feet—as fall I may—I shall not complain. That will be my look-out—and this is—his. I cannot separate, as I would, these men from their women and children. A fair fight is a fair fight! Let them learn to think before they pick a quarrel!

EDGAR. [In a low voice] But is it a fair fight, Father? Look at them, and look at us! They've only this one weapon!

ANTHONY. [Grimly] And you're weak-kneed enough to teach them how to use it! It seems the fashion nowadays for men to take their enemy's side. I have not learnt that art. Is it my fault that they quarrelled with their Union too?

EDGAR. There is such a thing as Mercy.

ANTHONY. And Justice comes before it.

EDGAR. What seems just to one man, sir, is injustice to another.

ANTHONY. [With suppressed passion] You accuse me of injustice—of what amounts to inhumanity—of cruelty——

[EDGAR makes a gesture of horror—a general frightened movement.]

WANKLIN. Come, come, Chairman!

ANTHONY. [*In a grim voice*] These are the words of my own son. They are the words of a generation that I don't understand; the words of a soft breed.

[*A general murmur. With a violent effort ANTHONY recovers his control.*

EDGAR. [*Quietly*] I said it of myself, too, Father.

[*A long look is exchanged between them, and ANTHONY puts out his hand with a gesture as if to sweep the personalities away; then places it against his brow, swaying as though from giddiness. There is a movement towards him. He waves them back.*

ANTHONY. Before I put this amendment to the Board, I have one more word to say. [*He looks from face to face.*] If it is carried, it means that we shall fail in what we set ourselves to do. It means that we shall fail in the duty that we owe to all Capital. It means that we shall fail in the duty that we owe ourselves. It means that we shall be open to constant attack to which we as constantly shall have to yield. Be under no misapprehension—run this time, and you will never make a stand again! You will have to fly like curs before the whips of your own men. If that is the lot you wish for, you will vote for this amendment. [*He looks again from face to face, finally resting his gaze on EDGAR; all sit with their eyes on the ground. ANTHONY makes a gesture, and TENCH hands him the book. He reads.*] “Moved by Mr. Wilder, and seconded by Mr. Wanklin. ‘That the men’s demands be placed at once in the hands of Mr. Simon Harness for settlement on the lines indicated by him this morning.’” [*With sudden vigour.*] Those in favour: Signify the same in the usual way!

[*For a minute no one moves; then hastily, just as ANTHONY is about to speak, WILDER’S hand and WANKLIN’S are held up, then SCANTLEBURY’S, and last EDGAR’S, who does not lift his head.*] Contrary? [*ANTHONY lifts his own hand.*

[*In a clear voice.*] The amendment is carried. I resign my position on this Board.

[*ENID gasps, and there is a dead silence. ANTHONY sits*

motionless, his head slowly drooping; suddenly he heaves as though the whole of his life had risen up within him.] Fifty years! You have disgraced me, gentlemen. Bring in the men!

[He sits motionless, staring before him. The Board draws hurriedly together, and forms a group. TENCH in a frightened manner speaks into the hall. UNDERWOOD almost forces ENID from the room.]

WILDER. *[Hurriedly]* What's to be said to them? Why isn't Harness here? Ought we to see the men before he comes? I don't——

TENCH. Will you come in, please?

[Enter THOMAS, GREEN, BULGIN and ROUS, who file up in a row past the little table. TENCH sits down and writes. All eyes are fixed on ANTHONY, who makes no sign.]

WANKLIN. *[Stepping up to the little table, with nervous cordiality]* Well, Thomas, how's it to be? What's the result of your meeting?

ROUS. Sim Harness has our answer. He'll tell you what it is. We're waiting for him. He'll speak for us.

WANKLIN. Is that so, Thomas?

THOMAS. *[Sullenly]* Yes. Roberts will not be coming, his wife is dead.

SCANTLEBURY. Yes, yes! Poor woman! Yes! Yes!

FROST. *[Entering from the hall]* Mr. Harness, sir!

[As HARNESS enters he retires.]

[HARNESS has a piece of paper in his hand, he bows to the Directors, nods towards the men, and takes his stand behind the little table in the very centre of the room.]

HARNESS. Good evening, gentlemen.

[TENCH, with the paper he has been writing, joins him, they speak together in low tones.]

WILDER. We've been waiting for you, Harness. Hope we shall come to some——

FROST. *[Entering from the hall]* Roberts. *[He goes.]*

[ROBERTS comes hastily in, and stands staring at ANTHONY. His face is drawn and old.]

ROBERTS. Mr. Anthony, I am afraid I am a little late. I would have been here in time but for something that—has happened. [*To the men*] Has anything been said?

THOMAS. No! But, man, what made ye come?

ROBERTS. Ye told us this morning, gentlemen, to go away and reconsider our position. We have reconsidered it; we are here to bring you the men's answer. [*To ANTHONY*] Go ye back to London. We have nothing for you. By no jot or tittle do we abate our demands, nor will we until the whole of those demands are yielded.

[*ANTHONY looks at him but does not speak. There is a movement amongst the men as though they were bewildered.*]

HARNESS. Roberts!

ROBERTS. [*Glancing fiercely at him, and back to ANTHONY*] Is that clear enough for ye? Is it short enough and to the point? Ye made a mistake to think that we would come to heel. Ye may break the body, but ye cannot break the spirit. Get back to London, the men have nothing for ye?

[*Pausing uneasily he takes a step towards the unmoving ANTHONY.*]

EDGAR. We're all sorry for you, Roberts, but——

ROBERTS. Keep your sorrow, young man. Let your Father speak!

HARNESS. [*With the sheet of paper in his hand, speaking from behind the little table*] Roberts!

ROBERTS. [*To ANTHONY, with passionate intensity*] Why don't ye answer?

HARNESS. Roberts!

ROBERTS. [*Turning sharply*] What is it?

HARNESS. [*Gravely*] You're talking without the book; things have travelled past you. [*He makes a sign to TENCH, who beckons the Directors. They quickly sign his copy of the terms.*] Look at this, man! [*Holding up his sheet of paper.*] 'Demands conceded, with the exception of those relating to the engineers and furnace men. Double wages for Saturday's overtime. Night-shifts as they are.' These terms have been agreed.

The men go back to work again to-morrow. The strike is at an end.

ROBERTS. [*Reading the paper, and turning on the men. They shrink back from him, all but Rous, who stands his ground. With deadly stillness*] Ye have gone back on me? I stood by ye to the death; ye waited for *that* to throw me over!

[*The men answer, all speaking together.*]

ROUS. It's a lie!

THOMAS. Ye were past endurance, man.

GREEN. If ye'd listen to me——

BULGIN. [*Under his breath*] Hold your jaw!

ROBERTS. Ye waited for *that*!

HARNES. [*Taking the Directors' copy of the terms, and handing his own to TENCH*] That's enough, men. You had better go.

[*The men shuffle slowly, awkwardly away.*]

WILDER. [*In a low, nervous voice*] There's nothing to stay for now, I suppose. [*He follows to the door.*] I shall have a try for that train! Coming, Scantlebury?

SCANTLEBURY. [*Following with WANKLIN*] Yes, yes; wait for me.

[*He stops as ROBERTS speaks.*]

ROBERTS. [*To ANTHONY*] But ye have not signed them terms! They can't make terms without their Chairman! Ye would never sign them terms!

[*ANTHONY looks at him without speaking.*]

Don't tell me ye have! for the love o' God! [*With passionate appeal*] I reckoned on ye!

HARNES. [*Holding out the Directors' copy of the terms*] The Board has signed!

[*ROBERTS looks dully at the signatures—dashes the paper from him, and covers up his eyes.*]

SCANTLEBURY. [*Behind his hand to TENCH*] Look after the Chairman! He's not well; he's not well—he had no lunch. If there's any fund started for the women and children, put me down for—for twenty pounds.

[*He goes out into the hall, in cumbrous haste; and WANKLIN, who has been staring at ROBERTS and ANTHONY with twitchings*

of his face, follows. EDGAR remains seated on the sofa, looking at the ground; TENCH, returning to the bureau, writes in his minute-book. HARNESS stands by the little table, gravely watching ROBERTS.

ROBERTS. Then you're no longer Chairman of this Company! [*Breaking into half-mad laughter.*] Ah! ha—ah, ha, ha! They've thrown ye over—thrown over their Chairman: Ah—ha—ha! [*With a sudden dreadful calm*] So—they've done us both down, Mr. Anthony?

[ENID, hurrying through the double doors, comes quickly to her father and bends over him.

HARNESS. [*Coming down and laying his hands on ROBERTS' sleeve*] For shame, Roberts! Go home quietly, man; go home!

ROBERTS. [*Tearing his arm away*] Home? [*Shrinking together—in a whisper*] Home!

ENID. [*Quietly to her father*] Come away, dear! Come to your room!

[ANTHONY rises with an effort. He turns to ROBERTS, who looks at him. They stand several seconds, gazing at each other fixedly; ANTHONY lifts his hand, as though to salute, but lets it fall. The expression of ROBERTS' face changes from hostility to wonder. They bend their heads in token of respect. ANTHONY turns, and slowly walks towards the curtained door. Suddenly he sways as though about to fall, recovers himself and is assisted out by ENID and EDGAR, who has hurried across the room. ROBERTS remains motionless for several seconds, staring intently after ANTHONY, then goes out into the hall.

TENCH. [*Approaching HARNESS*] It's a great weight off my mind, Mr. Harness! But what a painful scene, sir!

[*He wipes his brow.*

[HARNESS, pale and resolute, regards with a grim half-smile the quivering TENCH.] It's all been so violent! What did he mean by: "Done us both down?" If he has lost his wife, poor fellow, he oughtn't to have spoken to the Chairman like that!

HARNESS. A woman dead; and the two best men both broken!

[UNDERWOOD enters suddenly.

TENCH. [*Staring at HARNESS—suddenly excited*] D'you know, sir—these terms, they're the *very same* we drew up together, you and I, and put to both sides before the fight began? All this—all this—and—and what for?

HARNES. [*In a slow grim voice*] That's where the 'fun comes in!

[UNDERWOOD *without turning from the door makes a gesture of assent.*

The curtain falls.

JUSTICE: A TRAGEDY

CAST OF THE FIRST PRODUCTION AT THE DUKE OF YORK'S THEATRE, FEBRUARY 21, 1910

JAMES HOW	.	.	.	.	<i>Mr. Sydney Valentin</i>
WALTER HOW	.	.	.	.	<i>Mr. Charles Maude</i>
COKESON	.	.	.	.	<i>Mr. Edmund Gwenn</i>
FALDER	.	.	.	.	<i>Mr. Dennis Eadie</i>
THE OFFICE-BOY	.	.	.	.	<i>Mr. George Hersee</i>
THE DETECTIVE	.	.	.	.	<i>Mr. Leslie Carter</i>
THE CASHIER	.	.	.	.	<i>Mr. C. E. Vernon</i>
THE JUDGE	.	.	.	.	<i>Mr. Dion Boucicault</i>
THE OLD ADVOCATE	.	.	.	.	<i>Mr. Oscar Adye</i>
THE YOUNG ADVOCATE	.	.	.	.	<i>Mr. Charles Bryant</i>
THE PRISON GOVERNOR	.	.	.	.	<i>Mr. Grendon Bentley</i>
THE PRISON CHAPLAIN	.	.	.	.	<i>Mr. Hubert Harben</i>
THE PRISON DOCTOR	.	.	.	.	<i>Mr. Lewis Casson</i>
WOODER	.	.	.	.	<i>Mr. Frederick Lloyd</i>
MOANEY	.	.	.	.	<i>Mr. Robert Pateman</i>
CLIPTON	.	.	.	.	<i>Mr. O. P. Heggie</i>
O'CLEARY	.	.	.	.	<i>Mr. Whitford Kane</i>
RUTH HONEYWILL	.	.	.	.	<i>Miss Edyth Olive</i>

ACT I

The scene is the managing clerk's room, at the offices of JAMES AND WALTER HOW, on a July morning. The room is old-fashioned, furnished with well-worn mahogany and leather, and lined with tin boxes and estate plans. It has three doors. Two of them are close together in the centre of a wall. One of these two doors leads to the outer office, which is only divided from the managing clerk's room by a partition of wood and clear glass; and when the door into this outer office is opened there can be seen the wide outer door leading out on to the stone stairway of the building. The other of these two centre doors leads to the junior clerks' room. The third door is that leading to the partners' room.

The managing clerk, COKESON, is sitting at his table adding up figures in a pass-book, and murmuring their numbers to himself. He is a man of sixty, wearing spectacles; rather short, with a bald head, and an honest, pug-dog face. He is dressed in a well-worn black frock-coat and pepper-and-salt trousers.

COKESON. And five's twelve, and three—fifteen, nineteen, twenty-three, thirty-two, forty-one—and carry four. [*He ticks the page, and goes on murmuring.*] Five, seven, twelve, seventeen, twenty-four and nine, thirty-three, thirteen and carry one.

[*He again makes a tick. The outer office door is opened, and SWEEDLE, the office-boy, appears, closing the door behind him. He is a pale youth of sixteen, with spiky hair.*

COKESON. [*With grumpy expectation*] And carry one.

SWEEDLE. There's a party wants to see Falder, Mr. Cokeson.

COKESON. Five, nine, sixteen, twenty-one, twenty-nine—and carry two. Sent him to Morris's. What name?

SWEEDLE. Honeywill.

COKESON. What's his business?

SWEEDLE. It's a woman.

COKESON. A lady?

SWEEDLE. No, a person.

COKESON. Ask her in. Take this pass-book to Mr. James.
[*He closes the pass-book.*]

SWEEDLE. [*Reopening the door*] Will you come in, please?

[*RUTH HONEYWILL comes in. She is a tall woman, twenty-six years old, unpretentiously dressed, with black hair and eyes, and an ivory-white, clear-cut face. She stands very still, having a natural dignity of pose and gesture.*]

[*SWEEDLE goes out into the partners' room with the pass-book.*]

COKESON. [*Looking round at RUTH*] The young man's out.
[*Suspiciously.*] State your business, please.

RUTH. [*Who speaks in a matter-of-fact voice, and with a slight West-country accent*] It's a personal matter, sir.

COKESON. We don't allow private callers here. Will you leave a message?

RUTH. I'd rather see him, please.

[*She narrows her dark eyes and gives him a honeyed look.*]

COKESON. [*Expanding*] It's all against the rules. Suppose I had my friends here to see me! It'd never do!

RUTH. No, sir.

COKESON. [*A little taken aback*] Exactly! And here you are wanting to see a junior clerk!

RUTH. Yes, sir; I must see him.

COKESON. [*Turning full round to her with a sort of outraged interest*] But this is a lawyer's office. Go to his private address.

RUTH. He's not there.

COKESON. [*Uneasy*] Are you related to the party?

RUTH. No, sir.

COKESON. [*In real embarrassment*] I don't know what to say. It's no affair of the office.

RUTH. But what am I to do?

COKESON. Dear me! I can't tell you that.

[*SWEEDLE comes back. He crosses to the outer office and passes*]

through into it, with a quizzical look at COKESON, carefully leaving the door an inch or two open.

COKESON. [Fortified by this look] This won't do, you know, this won't do at all. Suppose one of the partners came in!

[An incoherent knocking and chuckling is heard from the outer door of the outer office.]

SWEEDLE. [Putting his head in] There's some children outside here.

RUTH. They're mine, please.

SWEEDLE. Shall I hold them in check?

RUTH. They're quite small, sir. [She takes a step towards

COKESON.]

COKESON. You mustn't take up his time in office hours; we're a clerk short as it is.

RUTH. It's a matter of life and death.

COKESON. [Again outraged] Life and death!

SWEEDLE. Here is Falder.

[FALDER has entered through the outer office. He is a pale, good-looking young man, with quick, rather scared eyes. He moves towards the door of the clerks' office, and stands there irresolute.]

COKESON. Well, I'll give you a minute. It's not regular.

[Taking up a bundle of papers, he goes out into the partners' room.]

RUTH. [In a low, hurried voice] He's on the drink again, Will. He tried to cut my throat last night. I came out with the children before he was awake. I went round to you——

FALDER. I've changed my digs.

RUTH. Is it all ready for to-night?

FALDER. I've got the tickets. Meet me 11.45 at the booking office. For God's sake don't forget we're man and wife! [Looking at her with tragic intensity.] Ruth!

RUTH. You're not afraid of going, are you?

FALDER. Have you got your things, and the children's?

RUTH. Had to leave them, for fear of waking Honeywill, all but one bag. I can't go near home again.

FALDER. [Wincing] All that money gone for nothing. How much *must* you have?

RUTH. Six pounds—I could do with that, I think.

FALDER. Don't give away where we're going. [*As if to himself*] When I get out there I mean to forget it all.

RUTH. If you're sorry, say so. I'd sooner he killed me than take you against your will.

FALDER. [*With a queer smile*] We've got to go. I don't care; I'll have you.

RUTH. You've just to say; it's not too late.

FALDER. It is too late. Here's seven pounds. Booking office—11.45 to-night. If you weren't what you are to me, Ruth——!

RUTH. Kiss me!

[*They cling together passionately, then fly apart just as COKESON re-enters the room. RUTH turns and goes out through the outer office. COKESON advances deliberately to his chair and seats himself.*

COKESON. This isn't right, Falder.

FALDER. It shan't occur again, sir.

COKESON. It's an improper use of these premises.

FALDER. Yes, sir.

COKESON. You quite understand—the party was in some distress; and, having children with her, I allowed my feelings—— [*He opens a drawer and produces from it a tract.*] Just take this! “Purity in the Home.” It's a well-written thing.

FALDER. [*Taking it, with a peculiar expression*] Thank you, sir.

COKESON. And look here, Falder, before Mr. Walter comes, have you finished up that cataloguing Davis had in hand before he left?

FALDER. I shall have done with it to-morrow, sir—for good.

COKESON. It's over a week since Davis went. Now it won't do, Falder. You're neglecting your work for private life. I shan't mention about the party having called, but——

FALDER. [*Passing into his room*] Thank you, sir.

[*COKESON stares at the door through which FALDER has gone*

out; then shakes his head, and is just settling down to write, when WALTER HOW comes in through the outer office. He is a rather refined-looking man of thirty-five, with a pleasant, almost apologetic voice.

WALTER. Good-morning, Cokeson.

COKESON. Morning, Mr. Walter.

WALTER. My father here?

COKESON. [*Always with a certain patronage as to a young man who might be doing better*] Mr. James has been here since eleven o'clock.

WALTER. I've been in to see the pictures, at the Guildhall.

COKESON. [*Looking at him as though this were exactly what was to be expected*] Have you now—ye-es. This lease of Boulter's—am I to send it to counsel?

WALTER. What does my father say?

COKESON. 'Aven't bothered him.

WALTER. Well, we can't be too careful.

COKESON. It's such a little thing—hardly worth the fees. I thought you'd do it yourself.

WALTER. Send it, please. I don't want the responsibility.

COKESON. [*With an indescribable air of compassion*] Just as you like. This "right-of-way" case—we've got 'em on the deeds.

WALTER. I know; but the intention was obviously to exclude that bit of common ground.

COKESON. We needn't worry about that. We're the *right* side of the law.

WALTER. I don't like it.

COKESON. [*With an indulgent smile*] We shan't want to set ourselves up against the law. Your father wouldn't waste his time doing that.

[*As he speaks*] JAMES HOW comes in from the partners' room. He is a shortish man, with white side-whiskers, plentiful grey hair, shrewd eyes, and gold pince-nez.

JAMES. Morning, Walter.

WALTER. How are you, father?

COKESON. [*Looking down his nose at the papers in his hand as though deprecating their size*] I'll just take Boulter's lease in to young Falder to draft the instructions.

[*He goes out into FALDER's room.*]

WALTER. About that right-of-way case?

JAMES. Oh, well, we must go forward there. I thought you told me yesterday the firm's balance was over four hundred.

WALTER. So it is.

JAMES. [*Holding out the pass-book to his son*] Three—five—one, no recent cheques. Just get me out the cheque-book.

[*WALTER goes to a cupboard, unlocks a drawer, and produces a cheque-book.*]

JAMES. Tick the pounds in the counterfoils. Five, fifty-four, seven, five, twenty-eight, twenty, ninety, eleven, fifty-two, seventy-one. Tally?

WALTER. [*Nodding*] Can't understand. Made sure it was over four hundred.

JAMES. Give me the cheque-book. [*He takes the cheque-book and cons the counterfoils.*] What's this ninety?

WALTER. Who drew it?

JAMES. You.

WALTER. [*Taking the cheque-book*] July 7th? That's the day I went down to look over the 'Trenton Estate—last Friday week; I came back on the Tuesday, you remember. But look here, father, it was *nine* I drew a cheque for. Five guineas to Smithers and my expenses. It just covered all but half a crown.

JAMES. [*Gravely*] Let's look at that ninety cheque. [*He sorts the cheque out from the bundle in the pocket of the pass-book.*] Seems all right. There's no nine here. This is bad. Who cashed that nine-pound cheque?

WALTER. [*Puzzled and pained*] Let's see! I was finishing Mrs. Reddy's will—only just had time; yes—I gave it to Cokeson.

JAMES. Look at that *ty*: that yours?

WALTER. [*After consideration*] My *y*'s curl back a little; this doesn't.

JAMES. [*As COKESON re-enters from FALDER's room*] We must ask him. Just come here and carry your mind back a bit, Cokeson. D'you remember cashing a cheque for Mr. Walter last Friday week—the day he went to Trenton?

COKESON. Ye-es. Nine pounds.

JAMES. Look at this. [*Handing him the cheque.*]

COKESON. No! Nine pounds. My lunch was just coming in; and of course I *like* it hot; I gave the cheque to Davis to run round to the bank. He brought it back, all notes—you remember, Mr. Walter, you wanted some silver to pay your cab. [*With a certain contemptuous compassion.*] Here, let me see. You've got the wrong cheque.

[*He takes cheque-book and pass-book from WALTER.*]

WALTER. Afraid not.

COKESON. [*Having seen for himself*] It's funny.

JAMES. You gave it to Davis, and Davis sailed for Australia on Monday. Looks black, Cokeson.

COKESON. [*Puzzled and upset*] Why this'd be a felony! No, no! there's some mistake.

JAMES. I hope so.

COKESON. There's never been anything of that sort in the office the twenty-nine years I've been here.

JAMES. [*Looking at cheque and counterfoil*] This is a very clever bit of work; a warning to you not to leave space after your figures, Walter.

WALTER. [*Vexed*] Yes, I know—I was in such a tearing hurry that afternoon.

COKESON. [*Suddenly*] This has upset me.

JAMES. The counterfoil altered too—very deliberate piece of swindling. What was Davis's ship?

WALTER. *City of Rangoon.*

JAMES. We ought to wire and have him arrested at Naples; he can't be there yet.

COKESON. His poor young wife. I liked the young man. Dear, oh dear! In this office!

WALTER. Shall I go to the bank and ask the cashier?

JAMES. [*Grimly*] Bring him round here. And ring up Scotland Yard.

WALTER. Really?

[*He goes out through the outer office.* JAMES paces the room. He stops and looks at COKESON, who is disconsolately rubbing the knees of his trousers.

JAMES. Well, Cokeson! There's something in character, isn't there?

COKESON. [*Looking at him over his spectacles*] I don't quite take you, sir.

JAMES. Your story would sound d——d thin to anyone who didn't know you.

COKESON. Ye-es! [*He laughs. Then with sudden gravity*] I'm sorry for that young man. I feel it as if it was my own son, Mr. James.

JAMES. A nasty business!

COKESON. It unsettles you. All goes on regular, and then a thing like this happens. Shan't relish my lunch to-day.

JAMES. As bad as that, Cokeson?

COKESON. It makes you think. [*Confidentially*] He must have had temptation.

JAMES. Not so fast. We haven't convicted him yet.

COKESON. I'd sooner have lost a month's salary than had this happen. [*He broods.*

JAMES. I hope that fellow will hurry up.

COKESON. [*Keeping things pleasant for the cashier*] It isn't fifty yards, Mr. James. He won't be a minute.

JAMES. The idea of dishonesty about this office—it hits me hard, Cokeson. [*He goes towards the door of the partners' room.*

SWEEDLE. [*Entering quietly, to COKESON in a low voice*] She's popped up again, sir—something she forgot to say to Falder.

COKESON. [*Roused from his abstraction*] Eh? Impossible. Send her away!

JAMES. What's that?

COKESON. Nothing, Mr. James. A private matter. Here, I'll come myself. [*He goes into the outer office as JAMES passes*

into the partners' room.] Now, you really mustn't—we can't have anybody just now.

RUTH. Not for a minute, sir?

COKESON. Reely! Reely! I can't have it. If you want him, wait about; he'll be going out for his lunch directly.

RUTH. Yes, sir.

[WALTER, *entering with the cashier, passes RUTH as she leaves the outer office.*

COKESON. [*To the cashier, who resembles a sedentary dragoon*] Good-morning. [*To WALTER*] Your father's in there.

[WALTER *crosses and goes into the partners' room.*

COKESON. It's a nahsty, unpleasant little matter, Mr. Cowley. I'm quite ashamed to have to trouble you.

COWLEY. I remember the cheque quite well. [*As if it were a liver.*] Seemed in perfect order.

COKESON. Sit down, won't you? I'm not a sensitive man, but a thing like this about the place—it's not nice. I like people to be open and jolly together.

COWLEY. Quite so.

COKESON. [*Button-holing him, and glancing towards the partners' room*] Of course he's a young man. I've told him about it before now—leaving space after his figures, but he *will* do it.

COWLEY. I should remember the person's face—quite a youth.

COKESON. I don't think we shall be able to show him to you, as a matter of fact.

[JAMES and WALTER *have come back from the partners' room.*

JAMES. Good-morning, Mr. Cowley. You've seen my son and myself, you've seen Mr. Cokeson, and you've seen Sweedle, my office-boy. It was none of us, I take it.

[*The cashier shakes his head with a smile.*

JAMES. Be so good as to sit here. Cokeson, engage Mr. Cowley in conversation, will you?

[*He goes towards FALDER's room.*

COKESON. Just a word, Mr. James.

JAMES. Well?

COKESON. You don't want to upset the young man in there, do you? He's a nervous young feller.

JAMES. This must be thoroughly cleared up, Cokeson, for the sake of Falder's name, to say nothing of yours.

COKESON. [*With some dignity*] That'll look after itself, sir. He's been upset once this morning; I don't want him startled again.

JAMES. It's a matter of form; but I can't stand upon niceness over a thing like this—too serious. Just talk to Mr. Cowley.

[*He opens the door of FALDER's room.*]

JAMES. Bring in the papers in Boulter's lease, will you, Falder?

COKESON. [*Bursting into voice*] Do you keep dogs?

[*The cashier, with his eyes fixed on the door, does not answer.*]

COKESON. You haven't such a thing as a bulldog pup you could spare me, I suppose?

[*At the look on the cashier's face his jaw drops, and he turns to see FALDER standing in the doorway, with his eyes fixed on COWLEY, like the eyes of a rabbit fastened on a snake.*]

FALDER. [*Advancing with the papers*] Here they are, sir.

JAMES. [*Taking them*] Thank you.

FALDER. Do you want me, sir?

JAMES. No, thanks!

[*FALDER turns and goes back into his own room. As he shuts the door JAMES gives the cashier an interrogative look, and the cashier nods.*]

JAMES. Sure? This isn't as we suspected.

COWLEY. Quite. He knew me. I suppose he can't slip out of that room?

COKESON. [*Gloomily*] There's only the window—a whole floor and a basement.

[*The door of FALDER's room is quietly opened, and FALDER, with his hat in his hand, moves towards the door of the outer office.*]

JAMES. [*Quietly*] Where are you going, Falder?

FALDER. To have my lunch, sir.

JAMES. Wait a few minutes, would you? I want to speak to you about this lease.

FALDER. Yes, sir. *[He goes back into his room.]*

COWLEY. If I'm wanted, I can swear that's the young man who cashed the cheque. It was the last cheque I handled that morning before my lunch. These are the numbers of the notes he had. *[He puts a slip of paper on the table; then, brushing his hat round]* Good-morning!

JAMES. Good-morning, Mr. Cowley!

COWLEY. *[To COKESON]* Good-morning.

COKESON. *[With stupefaction]* Good-morning.

[The cashier goes out through the outer office. COKESON sits down in his chair, as though it were the only place left in the morass of his feelings.]

WALTER. What are you going to do?

JAMES. Have him in. Give me the cheque and the counterfoil.

COKESON. I don't understand. I thought young Davis——

JAMES. We shall see.

WALTER. One moment, father: have you thought it out?

JAMES. Call him in!

COKESON. *[Rising with difficulty and opening FALDER's door; hoarsely]* Step in here a minute. *[FALDER comes in.]*

FALDER. *[Impassively]* Yes, sir?

JAMES. *[Turning to him suddenly with the cheque held out]* You know this cheque, Falder?

FALDER. No, sir.

JAMES. Look at it. You cashed it last Friday week.

FALDER. Oh! yes, sir; that one—Davis gave it me.

JAMES. I know. And you gave Davis the cash?

FALDER. Yes, sir.

JAMES. When Davis gave you the cheque was it exactly like this?

FALDER. Yes, I think so, sir.

JAMES. You know that Mr. Walter drew that cheque for nine pounds?

FALDER. No, sir—ninety.

JAMES. Nine, Falder.

FALDER. [*Faintly*] I don't understand, sir.

JAMES. The suggestion, of course, is that the cheque was altered; whether by you or Davis is the question.

FALDER. I—I——

COKESON. Take your time, take your time.

FALDER. [*Regaining his impassivity*] Not by me, sir.

JAMES. The cheque was handed to Cokeson by Mr. Walter at one o'clock; we know that because Mr. Cokeson's lunch had just arrived.

COKESON. I couldn't leave it.

JAMES. Exactly; he therefore gave the cheque to Davis. It was cashed by you at 1.15. We know that because the cashier recollects it for the last cheque he handled before *his* lunch.

FALDER. Yes, sir, Davis gave it to me because some friends were giving him a farewell luncheon.

JAMES. [*Puzzled*] You accuse Davis, then?

FALDER. I don't know, sir—it's very funny.

[*WALTER, who has come close to his father, says something to him in a low voice.*]

JAMES. Davis was not here again after that Saturday, was he?

COKESON. [*Anxious to be of assistance to the young man, and seeing faint signs of their all being jolly once more*] No, he sailed on the Monday.

JAMES. Was he, Falder?

FALDER. [*Very faintly*] No, sir.

JAMES. Very well, then, how do you account for the fact that this nought was added to the nine in the counterfoil on or after *Tuesday*?

COKESON. [*Surprised*] How's that?

[*FALDER gives a sort of lurch; he tries to pull himself together, but he has gone all to pieces.*]

JAMES. [*Very grimly*] Out, I'm afraid, Cokeson. The cheque-book remained in Mr. Walter's pocket till he came back from Trenton on Tuesday morning. In the face of this, Falder, do you still deny that you altered both cheque and counterfoil?

FALDER. No, sir—no, Mr. How. I did it, sir; I did it.

COKESON. [*Succumbing to his feelings*] Dear, dear! what a thing to do!

FALDER. I wanted the money so badly, sir. I didn't know what I was doing.

COKESON. However such a thing could have come into your head!

FALDER. [*Grasping at the words*] I can't think, sir, really! It was just a minute of madness.

JAMES. A long minute, Falder. [*Tapping the counterfoil.*] Four days at least.

FALDER. Sir, I swear I didn't know what I'd done till afterwards, and then I hadn't the pluck. Oh! sir, look over it! I'll pay the money back—I will, I promise.

JAMES. Go into your room.

[FALDER, with a swift imploring look, goes back into his room. There is silence.]

JAMES. About as bad a case as there could be.

COKESON. To break the law like that—in here!

WALTER. What's to be done?

JAMES. Nothing for it. Prosecute.

WALTER. It's his first offence.

JAMES. [*Shaking his head*] I've grave doubts of that. Too neat a piece of swindling altogether.

COKESON. I shouldn't be surprised if he was tempted.

JAMES. Life's one long temptation, Cokeson.

COKESON. Ye-es, but I'm speaking of the flesh and the devil, Mr. James. There was a woman come to see him this morning.

WALTER. The woman we passed as we came in just now. Is it his wife?

COKESON. No, no relation. [*Restraining what in jollier circumstances would have been a wink.*] A married person, though.

WALTER. How do you know?

COKESON. Brought her children. [*Scandalized.*] There they were outside the office.

JAMES. A real bad egg.

WALTER. I should like to give him a chance.

JAMES. I can't forgive him for the sneaky way he went to work—counting on our suspecting young Davis if the matter came to light. It was the merest accident the cheque-book stayed in your pocket.

WALTER. It *must* have been the temptation of a moment. He hadn't time.

JAMES. A man doesn't succumb like that in a moment, if he's a clean mind and habits. He's rotten; got the eyes of a man who can't keep his hands off when there's money about.

WALTER. [*Dryly*] We hadn't noticed that before.

JAMES. [*Brushing the remark aside*] I've seen lots of those fellows in my time. No doing anything with them except to keep 'em out of harm's way. They've got a blind spot.

WALTER. It's penal servitude.

COKESON. They're *nahsty* places—prisons.

JAMES. [*Hesitating*] I don't see how it's possible to spare him. Out of the question to keep him in this office—honesty's the *sine qua non*.

COKESON. [*Hypnotized*] Of course it is.

JAMES. Equally out of the question to send him out amongst people who've no knowledge of his character. One must think of society.

WALTER. But to brand him like this?

JAMES. If it had been a straightforward case I'd give him another chance. It's far from that. He has dissolute habits.

COKESON. I didn't say that—extenuating circumstances.

JAMES. Same thing. He's gone to work in the most cold-blooded way to defraud his employers, and cast the blame on an innocent man. If that's not a case for the law to take its course, I don't know what is.

WALTER. For the sake of his future, though.

JAMES. [*Sarcastically*] According to you, no one would ever prosecute.

WALTER. [*Nettled*] I hate the idea of it.

COKESON. We must have protection.

JAMES. This is degenerating into talk.

[He moves towards the partners' room.]
WALTER. Put yourself in his place, father.

JAMES. You ask too much of me.

WALTER. We can't possibly tell the pressure there was on him.

JAMES. You may depend on it, my boy, if a man is going to do this sort of thing he'll do it, pressure or no pressure; if he isn't nothing'll make him.

WALTER. He'll never do it again.

COKESON. [*Fatuously*] S'pose I were to have a talk with him. We don't want to be hard on the young man.

JAMES. That'll do, Cokeson. I've made up my mind.
[He passes into the partners' room.]

COKESON. [*After a doubtful moment*] We must excuse your father. I don't want to go against your father; if he thinks it right.

WALTER. Confound it, Cokeson! why don't you back me up? You know you feel——

COKESON. [*On his dignity*] I really can't say what I feel.

WALTER. We shall regret it.

COKESON. He must have known what he was doing.

WALTER. [*Bitterly*] "The quality of mercy is not strained."

COKESON. [*Looking at him askance*] Come, come, Mr. Walter. We must try and see it sensible.

SWEEDLE. [*Entering with a tray*] Your lunch, sir.

COKESON. Put it down!

[*While SWEEDLE is putting it down on COKESON's table, the detective, WISTER, enters the outer office, and, finding no one there, comes to the inner doorway. He is a square, medium-sized man, clean-shaved, in a serviceable blue serge suit and strong boots.*]

WISTER. [*To WALTER*] From Scotland Yard, sir. Detective-Sergeant Wister.

WALTER. [*Askance*] Very well! I'll speak to my father.

[*He goes in to the partners' room. JAMES enters.*]

JAMES. Morning!

[*In answer to an appealing gesture from COKESON.*]

I'm sorry; I'd stop short of this if I felt I could. Open that door. [SWEEDLE, *wondering and scared, opens it.*] Come here, Mr. Falder.

[*As FALDER comes shrinkingly out, the detective, in obedience to a sign from JAMES, slips his hand out and grasps his arm.*

FALDER. [*Recoiling*] Oh! no—oh! no!

WISTER. Come, come, there's a good lad.

JAMES. I charge him with felony.

FALDER. Oh, sir! There's someone—I did it for her. Let me be till to-morrow.

[*JAMES motions with his head. At that sign of hardness, FALDER becomes rigid. Then, turning, he goes out quietly in the detective's grip. JAMES follows, stiff and erect. SWEEDLE, rushing to the door with open mouth, pursues them through the outer office into the corridor. When they have all disappeared COKESON spins completely round and makes a rush for the outer office.*

COKESON. [*Hoarsely*] Here! Here! What are we doing?

[*There is silence. He takes out his handkerchief and mops the sweat from his face. Going back blindly to his table, he sits down, and stares blankly at his lunch.*

The curtain falls.

ACT II

A Court of Justice, on a foggy October afternoon—crowded with barristers, solicitors, reporters, ushers, and jurymen. Sitting in the large, solid dock is FALDER, with a warder on either side of him, placed there for his safe custody, but seemingly indifferent to and unconscious of his presence. FALDER is sitting exactly opposite to the JUDGE, who, raised above the clamour of the court, also seems unconscious of and indifferent to everything. HAROLD CLEAVER, the counsel for the Crown, is a dried, yellowish man, of more than middle age, in a wig worn almost to the colour of his face. HECTOR FROME, the counsel for the defence, is a young, tall man, clean-shaved, in a very white wig. Among the spectators, having already given their evidence, are JAMES and WALTER HOW, and COWLEY, the cashier. WISTER, the detective, is just leaving the witness-box.

CLEAVER. That is the case for the Crown, me lud!

[Gathering his robes together, he sits down.]

FROME. *[Rising and bowing to the JUDGE]* If it please your lordship and members of the jury. I am not going to dispute the fact that the prisoner altered this cheque, but I am going to put before you evidence as to the condition of his mind, and to submit that you would not be justified in finding that he was responsible for his actions at the time. I am going to show you, in fact, that he did this in a moment of aberration, amounting to temporary insanity, caused by the violent distress under which he was labouring. Gentlemen, the prisoner is only twenty-three years old. I shall call before you a woman from whom you will learn the events that led up to this act. You will hear from her own lips the tragic circumstances of her life, the still more tragic infatuation with which she has inspired the prisoner. This woman, gentlemen, has been leading a miserable existence

with a husband who habitually ill-uses her, from whom she actually goes in terror of her life. I am not, of course, saying that it's either right or desirable for a young man to fall in love with a married woman, or that it's his business to rescue her from an ogre-like husband. I'm not saying anything of the sort. But we all know the power of the passion of love; and I would ask you to remember, gentlemen, in listening to her evidence, that, married to a drunken and violent husband, she has no power to get rid of him; for, as you know, another offence besides violence is necessary to enable a woman to obtain a divorce; and of this offence it does not appear that her husband is guilty.

JUDGE. Is this relevant, Mr. Frome?

FROME. My lord, I submit, extremely—I shall be able to show your lordship that directly.

JUDGE. Very well.

FROME. In these circumstances, what alternatives were left to her? She could either go on living with this drunkard, in terror of her life; or she could apply to the Court for a separation order. Well, gentlemen, my experience of such cases assures me that this would have given her very insufficient protection from the violence of such a man; and even if effectual would very likely have reduced her either to the workhouse or the streets—for it's not easy, as she is now finding, for an unskilled woman without means of livelihood to support herself and her children without resorting either to the Poor Law or—to speak quite plainly—to the sale of her body.

JUDGE. You are ranging rather far, Mr. Frome.

FROME. I shall fire point-blank in a minute, my lord.

JUDGE. Let us hope so.

FROME. Now, gentlemen, mark—and this is what I have been leading up to—this woman will tell you, and the prisoner will confirm her, that, confronted with such alternatives, she set her whole hopes on himself, knowing the feeling with which she had inspired him. She saw a way out of her misery by going with him to a new country, where they would both be unknown,

and might pass as husband and wife. This was a desperate and, as my friend Mr. Cleaver will no doubt call it, an immoral resolution; but, as a fact, the minds of both of them were constantly turned towards it. One wrong is no excuse for another, and those who are never likely to be faced by such a situation possibly have the right to hold up their hands—as to that I prefer to say nothing. But whatever view you take, gentlemen, of this part of the prisoner's story—whatever opinion you form of the right of these two young people under such circumstances to take the law into their own hands—the fact remains that this young woman in her distress, and this young man, little more than a boy, who was so devotedly attached to her, *did* conceive this—if you like—reprehensible design of going away together. Now, for that, of course, they required money, and—they had none. As to the actual events of the morning of July 7th, on which this cheque was altered, the events on which I rely to prove the defendant's irresponsibility—I shall allow those events to speak for themselves, through the lips of my witnesses. Robert Cokeson. [*He turns, looks round, takes up a sheet of paper, and waits.*]

[COKESON is summoned into court, and goes into the witness-box, holding his hat before him. The oath is administered to him.]

FROME. What is your name?

COKESON. Robert Cokeson.

FROME. Are you managing clerk to the firm of solicitors who employ the prisoner?

COKESON. Ye-es.

FROME. How long had the prisoner been in their employ?

COKESON. Two years. No, I'm wrong there—all but seventeen days.

FROME. Had you him under your eye all that time?

COKESON. Except Sundays and holidays.

FROME. Quite so. Let us hear, please, what you have to say about his general character during those two years.

COKESON. [*Confidentially to the jury, and as if a little surprised at being asked*] He was a nice, pleasant-spoken young

man. I'd no fault to find with him—quite the contrary. It was a *great* surprise to me when he did a thing like that.

FROME. Did he ever give you reason to suspect his honesty?

COKESON. No! To have dishonesty in our office, that'd never do.

FROME. I'm sure the jury fully appreciate that, Mr. Cokeson.

COKESON. Every man of business knows that honesty's the sign *qua nonne*. *essentially*

FROME. Do you give him a good character all round, or do you not?

COKESON. [*Turning to the JUDGE*] Certainly. We were all very jolly and pleasant together, until this happened. Quite upset me.

FROME. Now, coming to the morning of the 7th of July, the morning on which the cheque was altered. What have you to say about his demeanour that morning?

COKESON. [*To the jury*] If you ask me, I don't think he was quite *compos* when he did it.

THE JUDGE. [*Sharply*] Are you suggesting that he was insane?

COKESON. Not *compos*.

THE JUDGE. A little more precision, please.

FROME. [*Smoothly*] Just tell us, Mr. Cokeson.

COKESON. [*Somewhat outraged*] Well, in my opinion—[*looking at the JUDGE*]—such as it is—he was jumpy at the time. The jury will understand my meaning.

FROME. Will you tell us how you came to that conclusion?

COKESON. Ye-es, I will. I have my lunch in from the restaurant, a chop and a potato—saves time. That day it happened to come just as Mr. Walter How handed me the cheque. Well, I like it hot; so I went into the clerks' office and I handed the cheque to Davis, the other clerk, and told him to get change. I noticed young Falder walking up and down. I said to him: "This is not the Zoological Gardens, Falder."

FROME. Do you remember what he answered?

COKESON. Ye-es: "I wish to God it were!" Struck me as funny.

FROME. Did you notice anything else peculiar?

COKESON. I did.

FROME. What was that?

COKESON. His collar was unbuttoned. Now, I like a young man to be neat. I said to him: "Your collar's unbuttoned."

FROME. And what did he answer?

COKESON. Stared at me. It wasn't nice.

THE JUDGE. Stared at you? Isn't that a very common practice?

COKESON. Ye-es, but it was the look in his eyes. I can't explain my meaning—it was funny.

FROME. Had you ever seen such a look in his eyes before?

COKESON. No. If I had I should have spoken to the partners. We can't have anything eccentric in our profession.

THE JUDGE. Did you speak to them on that occasion?

COKESON. [*Confidentially*] Well, I didn't like to trouble them without prime facey evidence.

FROME. But it made a very distinct impression on your mind?

COKESON. Ye-es. The clerk Davis could have told you the same.

FROME. Quite so. It's very unfortunate that we've not got him here. Now can you tell me of the morning on which the discovery of the forgery was made? That would be the 18th. Did anything happen that morning?

COKESON. [*With his hand to his ear*] I'm a little deaf.

FROME. Was there anything in the course of that morning—I mean before the discovery—that caught your attention?

COKESON. Ye-es—a woman.

THE JUDGE. How is *this* relevant, Mr. Frome?

FROME. I am trying to establish the state of mind in which the prisoner committed this act, my lord.

THE JUDGE. I quite appreciate that. But this was long after the act.

FROME. Yes, my lord, but it contributes to my contention.

THE JUDGE. Well!

FROME. You say a woman. Do you mean that she came to the office?

COKESON. Ye-es.

FROME. What for?

COKESON. Asked to see young Falder; he was out at the moment.

FROME. Did you see her?

COKESON. I did.

FROME. Did she come alone?

COKESON. [*Confidentially*] Well, there you put me in a difficulty. I mustn't tell you what the office-boy told me.

FROME. Quite so, Mr. Cokeson, quite so——

COKESON. [*Breaking in with an air of "You are young—leave it to me"*] But I think we can get round it. In answer to a question put to her by a third party the woman said to me: "They're mine, sir."

THE JUDGE. What are? What were?

COKESON. Her children. They were outside.

THE JUDGE. How do you know?

COKESON. Your lordship musn't ask me that, or I shall have to tell you what I was told—and that'd never do.

THE JUDGE. [*Smiling*] The office-boy made a statement.

COKESON. Egg-zactly.

FROME. What I want to ask you, Mr. Cokeson, is this. In the course of her appeal to see Falder, did the woman say anything that you specially remember?

COKESON. [*Looking at him as if to encourage him to complete the sentence*] A lectle more, sir.

FROME. Or did she not?

COKESON. She did. I shouldn't like you to have led me to the answer.

FROME. [*With an irritated smile*] Will you tell the jury what it was?

COKESON. "It's a matter of life and death."

FOREMAN OF THE JURY. Do you mean the woman said that?

COKESON. [*Nodding*] It's not the sort of thing you like to have said to you.

FROME. [*A little impatiently*] Did Falder come in while she

was there? [COKESON *nods*.] And she saw him, and went away?

COKESON. Ah! there I can't follow you. I didn't see her go.

FROME. Well, is she there now?

COKESON. [*With an indulgent smile*] No!

FROME. Thank you, Mr. Cokeson. [*He sits down.*]

CLEAVER. [*Rising*] You say that on the morning of the forgery the prisoner was jumpy. Well, now, sir, what precisely do you mean by that word?

COKESON. [*Indulgently*] I *want* you to understand. Have you ever seen a dog that's lost its master? He was kind of everywhere at once with his eyes.

CLEAVER. Thank you; I was coming to his eyes. You called them "funny." What are we to understand by that. Strange, or what?

COKESON. Ye-es, funny.

CLEAVER. [*Sharply*] Yes, sir, but what may be funny to you may not be funny to me, or to the jury. Did they look frightened, or shy, or fierce, or what?

COKESON. You make it very hard for me. I give you the word, and you want me to give you another.

CLEAVER. [*Rapping his desk*] Does "funny" mean mad?

COKESON. Not mad, fun——

CLEAVER. Very well! Now you say he had his collar unbuttoned? Was it a hot day?

COKESON. Ye-es; I think it was.

CLEAVER. And did he button it when you called his attention to it?

COKESON. Ye-es, I think he did.

CLEAVER. Would you say that that denoted insanity?

[*He sits down.* COKESON, who has opened his mouth to reply, is left gaping.

FROME. [*Rising hastily*] Have you ever caught him in that dishevelled state before?

COKESON. No! He was *always* clean and quiet.

FROME. That will do, thank you.

[COKESON turns blandly to the JUDGE, as though to rebuke counsel for not remembering that the JUDGE might wish to have a chance; arriving at the conclusion that he is to be asked nothing further, he turns and descends from the box, and sits down next to JAMES and WALTER.

FROME. Ruth Honeywill.

[RUTH comes into court, and takes her stand stoically in the witness-box. She is sworn.

FROME. What is your name, please?

RUTH. Ruth Honeywill.

FROME. How old are you?

RUTH. Twenty-six.

FROME. You are a married woman, living with your husband? A little louder.

RUTH. No, sir; not since July.

FROME. Have you any children?

RUTH. Yes, sir, two.

FROME. Are they living with you?

RUTH. Yes, sir.

FROME. You know the prisoner?

RUTH. [Looking at him] Yes.

FROME. What was the nature of your relations with him?

RUTH. We were friends.

THE JUDGE. Friends?

RUTH. [Simply] Lovers, sir.

THE JUDGE. [Sharply] In what sense do you use that word?

RUTH. We love each other.

THE JUDGE. Yes, but——

RUTH. [Shaking her head] No, your lordship—not yet.

THE JUDGE. Not yet! H'm! [He looks from RUTH to FALDER.] Well!

FROME. What is your husband?

RUTH. Traveller.

FROME. And what was the nature of your married life?

RUTH. [Shaking her head] It don't bear talking about.

FROME. Did he ill-treat you, or what?

RUTH. Ever since my first was born.

FROME. In what way?

RUTH. I'd rather not say. All sorts of ways.

THE JUDGE. I am afraid I must stop this, you know.

RUTH. [*Pointing to FALDER*] He offered to take me out of it, sir. We were going to South America.

FROME. [*Hastily*] Yes, quite—and what prevented you?

RUTH. I was outside his office when he was taken away. It nearly broke my heart.

FROME. You knew, then, that he had been arrested?

RUTH. Yes, sir. I called at his office afterwards, and [*pointing to COKESON*] that gentleman told me all about it.

FROME. Now, do you remember the morning of Friday, July 7th?

RUTH. Yes.

FROME. Why?

RUTH. My husband nearly strangled me that morning.

THE JUDGE. Nearly strangled you!

RUTH. [*Bowing her head*] Yes, my lord.

FROME. With his hands, or——?

RUTH. Yes, I just managed to get away from him. I went straight to my friend. It was eight o'clock.

THE JUDGE. In the morning? Your husband was not under the influence of liquor then?

RUTH. It wasn't always that.

FROME. In what condition were you?

RUTH. In very bad condition, sir. My dress was torn, and I was half choking.

FROME. Did you tell your friend what had happened?

RUTH. Yes. I wish I never had.

FROME. It upset him?

RUTH. Dreadfully.

FROME. Did he ever speak to you about a cheque?

RUTH. Never.

FROME. Did he ever give you any money?

RUTH. Yes.

FROME. When was that?

RUTH. On Saturday.

FROME. The 8th?

RUTH. To buy an outfit for me and the children, and get all ready to start.

FROME. Did that surprise you, or not?

RUTH. What, sir?

FROME. That he had money to give you.

RUTH. Yes, because on the morning when my husband nearly killed me my friend cried because he hadn't the money to get me away. He told me afterwards he'd come into a windfall.

FROME. And when did you last see him? *under the sky*

RUTH. The day he was taken away, sir. It was the day we were to have started.

FROME. Oh, yes, the morning of the arrest. Well, did you see him at all between the Friday and that morning? [RUTH nods.] What was his manner then?

RUTH. Dumb-like—sometimes he didn't seem able to say a word.

FROME. As if something unusual had happened to him?

RUTH. Yes.

FROME. Painful, or pleasant, or what?

RUTH. Like a fate hanging over him.

FROME. [*Hesitating*] Tell me, did you love the defendant very much?

RUTH. [*Bowing her head*] Yes.

FROME. And had he a very great affection for you?

RUTH. [*Looking at FALDER*] Yes, sir.

FROME. Now, ma'am, do you or do you not think that your danger and unhappiness would seriously affect his balance, his control over his actions?

RUTH. Yes.

FROME. His reason, even?

RUTH. For a moment like, I think it would.

FROME. Was he very much upset that Friday morning, or was he fairly calm?

RUTH. Dreadfully upset. I could hardly bear to let him go from me.

FROME. Do you still love him?

RUTH. [*With her eyes on FALDER*] He's ruined himself for me.

FROME. Thank you.

[*He sits down. RUTH remains stoically upright in the witness-box.*]

CLEAVER. [*In a considerate voice*] When you left him on the morning of Friday the 7th you would not say that he was out of his mind, I suppose?

RUTH. No, sir.

CLEAVER. Thank you; I've no further questions to ask you.

RUTH. [*Bending a little forward to the jury*] I would have done the same for him; I would indeed.

THE JUDGE. Please, please! You say your married life is an unhappy one? Faults on both sides?

RUTH. Only that I never bowed down to him. I don't see why I should, sir, not to a man like that.

THE JUDGE. You refused to obey him?

RUTH. [*Avoiding the question*] I've always studied him to keep things nice.

THE JUDGE. Until you met the prisoner—was that it?

RUTH. No; even after that.

THE JUDGE. I ask, you know, because you seem to me to glory in this affection of yours for the prisoner.

RUTH. [*Hesitating*] I—I do. It's the only thing in my life now.

THE JUDGE. [*Staring at her hard*] Well, step down, please.

[*RUTH looks at FALDER, then passes quietly down and takes her seat among the witnesses.*]

FROME. I call the prisoner, my lord.

[*FALDER leaves the dock; goes into the witness-box, and is duly sworn.*]

FROME. What is your name?

FALDER. William Falder.

FROME. And age?

FALDER. Twenty-three.

FROME. You are not married? [FALDER *shakes his head*.]

FROME. How long have you known the last witness?

FALDER. Six months.

FROME. Is her account of the relationship between you a correct one?

FALDER. Yes.

FROME. You became devotedly attached to her, however?

FALDER. Yes.

THE JUDGE. Though you knew she was a married woman?

FALDER. I couldn't help it, your lordship.

THE JUDGE. Couldn't help it?

FALDER. I didn't seem able to.

[*The JUDGE slightly shrugs his shoulders.*]

FROME. How did you come to know her?

FALDER. Through my married sister.

FROME. Did you know whether she was happy with her husband?

FALDER. It was trouble all the time.

FROME. You knew her husband?

FALDER. Only through her—he's a brute.

THE JUDGE. I can't allow indiscriminate abuse of a person not present.

FROME. [*Bowing*] If your lordship pleases. [*To FALDER.*] You admit altering this cheque? [FALDER *bows his head*.]

FROME. Carry your mind, please, to the morning of Friday, July the 7th, and tell the jury what happened.

FALDER. [*Turning to the jury*] I was having my breakfast when she came. Her dress was all torn, and she was gasping and couldn't seem to get her breath at all; there were the marks of his fingers round her throat; her arm was bruised, and the blood had got into her eyes dreadfully. It frightened me, and then when she told me, I felt—I felt—well—it was too much for me! [*Hardening suddenly.*] If you'd seen it, having the feelings for her that I had, you'd have felt the same, I know.

FROME. Yes?

FALDER. When she left me—because I had to go to the office—I was out of my senses for fear that he'd do it again, and thinking what I could do. I couldn't work—all the morning I was like that—simply couldn't fix my mind on anything. I couldn't think at all. I seemed to have to keep moving. When Davis—the other clerk—gave me the cheque—he said: “It'll do you good, Will, to have a run with this. You seem half off your chump this morning.” Then when I had it in my hand—I don't know how it came, but it just flashed across me that if I put the *ty* and the nought there would be the money to get her away. It just came and went—I never thought of it again. Then Davis went out to his luncheon, and I don't really remember what I did till I'd pushed the cheque through to the cashier under the rail. I remember his saying “Notes?” Then I suppose I knew what I'd done. Anyway, when I got outside I wanted to chuck myself under a bus; I wanted to throw the money away; but it seemed I was in for it, so I thought at any rate I'd save her. Of course the tickets I took for the passage and the little I gave her's been wasted, and all, except what I was obliged to spend myself, I've restored. I keep thinking over and over however it was I came to do it, and how I can't have it all again to do differently!

[FALDER *is silent, twisting his hands before him.*

FROME. How far is it from your office to the bank?

FALDER. Not more than fifty yards, sir.

FROME. From the time Davis went out to lunch to the time you cashed the cheque, how long do you say it must have been?

FALDER. It couldn't have been four minutes, sir, because I ran all the way.

FROME. During those four minutes you say you remember nothing?

FALDER. No, sir; only that I ran.

FROME. Not even adding the *ty* and the nought?

FALDER. No, sir. I don't really.

[FROME *sits down, and CLEAVER rises.*

CLEAVER. But you remember running, do you?

FALDER. I was all out of breath when I got to the bank.

CLEAVER. And you don't remember altering the cheque?

FALDER. [*Faintly*] No, sir.

CLEAVER. Divested of the romantic glamour which my friend is casting over the case, is this anything but an ordinary forgery? Come.

FALDER. I was half frantic all that morning, sir.

CLEAVER. Now, now! You don't deny that the *ty* and the nought were so like the rest of the handwriting as to thoroughly deceive the cashier?

FALDER. It was an accident.

CLEAVER. [*Cheerfully*] Queer sort of accident, wasn't it? On which day did you alter the counterfoil?

FALDER. [*Hanging his head*] On the Wednesday morning.

CLEAVER. Was that an accident too?

FALDER. [*Faintly*] No.

CLEAVER. To do that you had to watch your opportunity, I suppose?

FALDER. [*Almost inaudibly*] Yes.

CLEAVER. You don't suggest that you were suffering under great excitement when you did that?

FALDER. I was haunted.

CLEAVER. With the fear of being found out?

FALDER. [*Very low*] Yes.

THE JUDGE. Didn't it occur to you that the only thing for you to do was to confess to your employers, and restore the money?

FALDER. I was afraid. [*There is silence.*]

CLEAVER. You desired, too, no doubt, to complete your design of taking this woman away?

FALDER. When I found I'd done a thing like that, to do it for nothing seemed so dreadful. I might just as well have chucked myself into the river.

CLEAVER. You knew that the clerk Davis was about to leave England—didn't it occur to you when you altered this cheque that suspicion would fall on him?

FALDER. It was all done in a moment. I thought of it afterwards.

CLEAVER. And that didn't lead you to avow what you'd done?

FALDER. [*Sullenly*] I meant to write when I got out there—I would have repaid the money.

THE JUDGE. But in the meantime your innocent fellow-clerk might have been prosecuted.

FALDER. I knew he was a long way off, your lordship. I thought there'd be time. I didn't think they'd find it out so soon.

FROME. I might remind your lordship that as Mr. Walter How had the cheque-book in his pocket till after Davis had sailed, if the discovery had been made only one day later Falder himself would have left, and suspicion would have attached to him, and not to Davis, from the beginning.

THE JUDGE. The question is whether the prisoner knew that suspicion would light on himself, and not on Davis. [*To FALDER sharply.*] Did you know that Mr. Walter How had the cheque-book till after Davis had sailed?

FALDER. I—I—thought—he——

THE JUDGE. Now speak the truth—yes or no!

FALDER. [*Very low*] No, my lord. I had no means of knowing.

THE JUDGE. That disposes of your point, Mr. Frome.

[FROME bows to the JUDGE.]

CLEAVER. Has any aberration of this nature ever attacked you before?

FALDER. [*Faintly*] No, sir.

CLEAVER. You had recovered sufficiently to go back to your work that afternoon?

FALDER. Yes, I had to take the money back.

CLEAVER. You mean the *nine* pounds. Your wits were sufficiently keen for you to remember that? And you still persist in saying you don't remember altering this cheque.

[*He sits down.*]

FALDER. If I hadn't been mad I should never have had the courage.

FROME. [*Rising*] Did you have your lunch before going back?

FALDER. I never ate a thing all day; and at night I couldn't sleep.

FROME. Now, as to the four minutes that elapsed between Davis's going out and your cashing the cheque: do you say that you recollect *nothing* during those four minutes?

FALDER. [*After a moment*] I remember thinking of Mr. Cokeson's face.

FROME. Of Mr. Cokeson's face! Had that any connection with what you were doing?

FALDER. No, sir.

FROME. Was that in the office, before you ran out?

FALDER. Yes, and while I was running.

FROME. And that lasted till the cashier said: "Will you have notes?"

FALDER. Yes, and then I seemed to come to myself—and it was too late.

FROME. Thank you. That closes the evidence for the defence, my lord.

[*The JUDGE nods, and FALDER goes back to his seat in the dock.*]

FROME. [*Gathering up notes*] If it please your Lordship—Members of the Jury,—My friend in cross-examination has shown a disposition to sneer at the defence which has been set up in this case, and I am free to admit that nothing I can say will move you, if the evidence has not already convinced you that the prisoner committed this act in a moment when to all practical intents and purposes he was not responsible for his actions; a moment of such mental and moral vacuity, arising from the violent emotional agitation under which he had been suffering, as to amount to temporary madness. My friend has alluded to the "romantic glamour" with which I have sought to invest this case. Gentlemen, I have done nothing of the kind. I have merely shown you the background of "life"—that palpitating life which, believe me—whatever my friend may say—always lies behind the commission of a crime. Now, gentlemen,

we live in a highly civilized age, and the sight of brutal violence disturbs us in a very strange way, even when we have no personal interest in the matter. But when we see it inflicted on a woman whom we love—what then? Just think of what your own feelings would have been, each of you, at the prisoner's age; and then look at him. Well! he is hardly the comfortable, shall we say bucolic, person likely to contemplate with equanimity marks of gross violence on a woman to whom he was devotedly attached. Yes, gentlemen, look at him! He has not a strong face; but neither has he a vicious face. He is just the sort of man who would easily become the prey of his emotions. You have heard the description of his eyes. My friend may laugh at the word "funny"—I think it better describes the peculiar uncanny look of those who are strained to breaking-point than any other word which could have been used. I don't pretend, mind you, that his mental irresponsibility was more than a flash of darkness, in which all sense of proportion became lost; but I do contend that, just as a man who destroys himself at such a moment may be, and often is, absolved from the stigma attaching to the crime of self-murder, so he may, and frequently does, commit other crimes while in this irresponsible condition, and that he may as justly be acquitted of criminal intent and treated as a patient. I admit that this is a plea which might well be abused. It is a matter for discretion. But here you have a case in which there is every reason to give the benefit of the doubt. You heard me ask the prisoner what he thought of during those four fatal minutes. What was his answer? "I thought of Mr. Cokeson's face?" Gentlemen, no man could invent an answer like that; it is absolutely stamped with truth. You have seen the great affection (legitimate or not) existing between him and this woman, who came here to give evidence for him at the risk of her life. It is impossible for you to doubt his distress on the morning when he committed this act. We well know what terrible havoc such distress can make in weak and highly nervous people. It was all the work of a moment. The rest has followed, as death follows a stab to the heart, or water drops if

you hold up a jug to empty it. Believe me, gentlemen, there is nothing more tragic in life than the utter impossibility of changing what you have done. Once this cheque was altered and presented, the work of four minutes—four mad minutes—the rest has been silence. But in those four minutes the boy before you has slipped through a door, hardly opened, into that great cage which never again quite lets a man go—the cage of the Law. His further acts, his failure to confess, the alteration of the counterfoil, his preparations for flight, are all evidence—not of deliberate and guilty intention when he committed the prime act from which these subsequent acts arose; no—they are merely evidence of the weak character which is clearly enough his misfortune. But is a man to be lost because he is bred and born with a weak character? Gentlemen, men like the prisoner are destroyed daily under our law for want of that human insight which sees them as they are, patients, and not criminals. If the prisoner be found guilty, and treated as though he were a criminal type, he will, as all experience shows, in all probability become one. I beg you not to return a verdict that may thrust him back into prison and brand him for ever. Gentlemen, Justice is a machine that, when someone has once given it the starting push, rolls on of itself. Is this young man to be ground to pieces under this machine for an act which at the worst was one of weakness? Is he to become a member of the luckless crews that man those dark, ill-starred ships called prisons? Is that to be his voyage—from which so few return? Or is he to have another chance, to be still looked on as one who has gone a little astray, but who will come back? I urge you, gentlemen, do not ruin this young man! For, as a result of those four minutes, ruin, utter and irretrievable, stares him in the face. He can be saved now. Imprison him as a criminal, and I affirm to you that he will be lost. He has neither the face nor the manner of one who can survive that terrible ordeal. Weigh in the scales his criminality and the suffering he has undergone. The latter is ten times heavier already. He has lain in prison under this charge for more than two months. Is

he likely ever to forget that? Imagine the anguish of his mind during that time. He has had his punishment, gentlemen, you may depend. The rolling of the chariot-wheels of Justice over this boy began when it was decided to prosecute him. We are now already at the second stage. If you permit it to go on to the third I would not give—that for him.

[He holds up finger and thumb in the form of a circle, drops his hand, and sits down.]

[The jury stir, and consult each other's faces; then they turn towards the counsel for the Crown, who rises, and, fixing his eyes on a spot that seems to give him satisfaction, slides them every now and then towards the jury.]

CLEAVER. May it please your Lordship. *[Rising on his toes.]* Gentlemen of the Jury,—The facts in this case are not disputed, and the defence, if my friend will allow me to say so, is so thin that I don't propose to waste the time of the Court by taking you over the evidence. The plea is one of temporary insanity. Well, gentlemen, I daresay it is clearer to me than it is to you why this rather—what shall we call it?—bizarre defence has been set up. The alternative would have been to plead guilty. Now, gentlemen, if the prisoner had pleaded guilty my friend would have had to rely on a simple appeal to his lordship. Instead of that, he has gone into the byways and hedges and found this—er—peculiar plea, which has enabled him to show you the proverbial woman, to put her in the box—to give, in fact, a romantic glow to this affair. I compliment my friend; I think it highly ingenious of him. By these means, he has—to a certain extent—got round the Law. He has brought the whole story of motive and stress out in court, at first hand, in a way that he would not otherwise have been able to do. But when you have once grasped that fact, gentlemen, you have grasped everything. *[With good-humoured contempt.]* For look at this plea of insanity; we can't put it lower than that. You have heard the woman. She has every reason to favour the prisoner, but what did she say? She said that the prisoner was *not* insane when she left him in the morning. If he were

going out of his mind through distress, that was obviously the moment when insanity would have shown itself. You have heard the managing clerk, another witness for the defence. With some difficulty I elicited from him the admission that the prisoner, though jumpy (a word that he seemed to think you would understand, gentlemen, and I'm sure I hope you do), was *not* mad when the cheque was handed to Davis. I agree with my friend that it's unfortunate that we have not got Davis here, but the prisoner has told you the words with which Davis in turn handed him the cheque; he obviously, therefore, was *not* mad when he received it, or he would not have remembered those words. The cashier has told you that he was certainly in his senses when he cashed it. We have therefore the plea that a man who is sane at ten minutes past one, and sane at fifteen minutes past, may, for the purposes of avoiding the consequences of a crime, call himself insane between those points of time. Really, gentlemen, this is so peculiar a proposition that I am not disposed to weary you with further argument. You will form your own opinion of its value. My friend has adopted this way of saying a great deal to you—and very eloquently—on the score of youth, temptation, and the like. I might point out, however, that the offence with which the prisoner is charged is one of the most serious known to our law; and there are certain features in this case, such as the suspicion which he allowed to rest on his innocent fellow-clerk, and his relations with this married woman, which will render it difficult for you to attach too much importance to such pleading. I ask you, in short, gentlemen, for that verdict of guilty which, in the circumstances, I regard you as, unfortunately, bound to record. *L*

[*Letting his eyes travel from the JUDGE and the jury to FROME, he sits down.*]

THE JUDGE. [*Bending a little towards the jury, and speaking in a business-like voice*] Members of the Jury, you have heard the evidence, and the comments on it. My only business is to make clear to you the issues you have to try. The facts are admitted, so far as the alteration of this cheque and counterfoil by the

prisoner. The defence set up is that he was not in a responsible condition when he committed the crime. Well, you have heard the prisoner's story, and the evidence of the other witnesses—so far as it bears on the point of insanity. If you think that what you have heard establishes the fact that the prisoner was insane at the time of the forgery, you will find him guilty but insane. If, on the other hand, you conclude from what you have seen and heard that the prisoner was sane—and nothing short of insanity will count—you will find him guilty. In reviewing the testimony as to his mental condition you must bear in mind very carefully the evidence as to his demeanour and conduct both before and after the act of forgery—the evidence of the prisoner himself, of the woman, of the witness—er—Cokeson, and—er—of the cashier. And in regard to that I especially direct your attention to the prisoner's admission that the idea of adding the *ty* and the nought did come into his mind at the moment when the cheque was handed to him; and also to the alteration of the counterfoil, and to his subsequent conduct generally. The bearing of all this on the question of premeditation (and premeditation will imply sanity) is very obvious. You must not allow any considerations of age or temptation to weigh with you in the finding of your verdict. Before you can come to a verdict guilty but insane, you must be well and thoroughly convinced that the condition of his mind was such as would have qualified him at the moment for a lunatic asylum. [*He pauses; then, seeing that the jury are doubtful whether to retire or no, adds:*] You may retire, gentlemen, if you wish to do so.

[*The jury retire by a door behind the JUDGE. The JUDGE bends over his notes. FALDER, leaning from the dock, speaks excitedly to his solicitor, pointing down at RUTH. The solicitor in turn speaks to FROME.*

FROME. [*Rising*] My lord. The prisoner is very anxious that I should ask you if your lordship would kindly request the reporters not to disclose the name of the woman witness in the Press reports of these proceedings. Your lordship will understand that the consequences might be extremely serious to her.

THE JUDGE. [*Pointedly—with the suspicion of a smile*] Well, Mr. Frome, you deliberately took this course which involved bringing her here.

FROME. [*With an ironic bow*] If your lordship thinks I could have brought out the full facts in any other way?

THE JUDGE. H'm! Well.

FROME. There is very real danger to her, your lordship.

THE JUDGE. You see, I have to take your word for all that.

FROME. If your lordship would be so kind. I can assure your lordship that I am not exaggerating.

THE JUDGE. It goes very much against the grain with me that the name of a witness should ever be suppressed. [*With a glance at FALDER, who is gripping and clasping his hands before him, and then at RUTH, who is sitting perfectly rigid with her eyes fixed on FALDER.*] I'll consider your application. It must depend. I have to remember that she may have come here to commit perjury on the prisoner's behalf.

FROME. Your lordship, I really——

THE JUDGE. Yes, yes—I don't suggest anything of the sort, Mr. Frome. Leave it at that for the moment.

[*As he finishes speaking, the jury return, and file back into the box.*]

CLERK OF ASSIZE. Members of the Jury, are you agreed on your verdict?

FOREMAN. We are.

CLERK OF ASSIZE. Is it Guilty, or Guilty but insane?

FOREMAN. Guilty.

[*The JUDGE nods; then, gathering up his notes, he looks at FALDER, who sits motionless.*]

FROME. [*Rising*] If your lordship would allow me to address you in mitigation of sentence. I don't know if your lordship thinks I can add anything to what I have said to the jury on the score of the prisoner's youth, and the great stress under which he acted.

THE JUDGE. I don't think you can, Mr. Frome.

FROME. If your lordship says so—I do most earnestly beg your lordship to give the utmost weight to my plea. [*He sits down.*]

THE JUDGE. [*To the Clerk*] Call upon him.

THE CLERK. Prisoner at the bar, you stand convicted of felony. Have you anything to say for yourself why the Court should not give you judgment according to Law?

[*FALDER shakes his head.*

THE JUDGE. William Falder, you have been given fair trial and found guilty, in my opinion rightly found guilty, of forgery. [*He pauses; then, consulting his notes, goes on.*] The defence was set up that you were not responsible for your actions at the moment of committing the crime. There is no doubt, I think, that this was a device to bring out at first hand the nature of the temptation to which you succumbed. For throughout the trial your counsel was in reality making an appeal for mercy. The setting up of this defence of course enabled him to put in some evidence that might weigh in that direction. Whether he was well advised to do so is another matter. He claimed that you should be treated rather as a patient than as a criminal. And this plea of his, which in the end amounted to a passionate appeal, he based in effect on an indictment of the march of Justice, which he practically accused of confirming and completing the process of criminality. Now, in considering how far I should allow weight to his appeal, I have a number of factors to take into account. I have to consider on the one hand the grave nature of your offence, the deliberate way in which you subsequently altered the counterfoil, the danger you caused to an innocent man—and that, to my mind, is a very grave point—and finally I have to consider the necessity of deterring others from following your example. On the other hand, I bear in mind that you are young, that you have hitherto borne a good character, that you were, if I am to believe your evidence and that of your witnesses, in a state of some emotional excitement when you committed this crime. I have every wish, consistently with my duty—not only to you, but to the community, to treat you with leniency. And this brings me to what are the determining factors in my mind in my consideration of your case. You are a clerk in a lawyer's office—that is a very serious

aggravation in this case; no possible excuse can be made for you on the ground that you were not fully conversant with the nature of the crime you were committing and the penalties that attach to it. It is said, however, that you were carried away by your emotions. The story has been told here to-day of your relations with this—er—Mrs. Honeywill; on that story both the defence and the plea for mercy were in effect based. Now what is that story? It is that you, a young man, and she a young woman unhappily married, had formed an attachment, which you both say—with what truth I am unable to gauge—had not yet resulted in immoral relations, but which you both admit was about to result in such relationship. Your counsel has made an attempt to palliate this, on the ground that the woman is in what he describes, I think, as “a hopeless position.” As to that I can express no opinion. She is a married woman, and the fact is patent that you committed this crime with the view of furthering an immoral design. Now, however I might wish, I am not able to justify to my conscience a plea for mercy which has a basis inimical to morality. It is vitiated *ab initio*. Your counsel has made an attempt also to show that to punish you with further imprisonment would be unjust. I do not follow him in these flights. *(The Law is what it is—*a majestic edifice, sheltering all of us, each stone of which rests on another. I am concerned only with its administration. The crime you have committed is a very serious one. I cannot feel it in accordance with my duty to society to exercise the powers I have in your favour. You will go to penal servitude for three years.)

[FALDER, who throughout the JUDGE's speech has looked at him steadily, lets his head fall forward on his breast. RUTH starts up from her seat as he is taken out by the warders. There is a bustle in court.]

THE JUDGE. [*Speaking to the reporters*] Gentlemen of the Press, I think that the name of the female witness should not be reported. [*The reporters bow their acquiescence.*]

THE JUDGE. [*To RUTH, who is staring in the direction in*

which FALDER has disappeared] Do you understand, your name will not be mentioned?

COKESON. [*Pulling her sleeve*] The judge is speaking to you.

[*RUTH turns, stares at the JUDGE, and turns away.*

THE JUDGE. I shall sit rather late to-day. Call the next case.

CLERK OF ASSIZE. [*To a warder*] Put up John Booley.

[*To cries of "Witnesses in the case of Booley"*

The curtain falls.

ACT III

SCENE I

A prison. A plainly furnished room, with two large barred windows, overlooking the prisoners' exercise yard, where men, in yellow clothes marked with arrows, and yellow brimless caps, are seen in single file at a distance of four yards from each other walking rapidly on serpentine white lines marked on the concrete floor of the yard. Two warders in blue uniforms, with peaked caps and swords, are stationed amongst them. The room has distempered walls, a bookcase with numerous official-looking books, a cupboard between the windows, a plan of the prison on the wall, a writing-table covered with documents. It is Christmas Eve.

THE GOVERNOR, *a neat, grave-looking man, with a trim, fair moustache, the eyes of a theorist, and grizzled hair, receding from the temples, is standing close to this writing-table looking at a sort of rough saw made out of a piece of metal. The hand in which he holds it is gloved, for two fingers are missing. The chief warder, WOODER, a tall, thin, military-looking man of sixty, with grey moustache and melancholy, monkey-like eyes, stands very upright two paces from him.*

THE GOVERNOR. [*With a faint, abstracted smile*] Queer-looking affair, Mr. Wooder! Where did you find it?

WOODER. In his mattress, sir. Haven't come across such a thing for two years now.

THE GOVERNOR. [*With curiosity*] Had he any set plan?

WOODER. He'd sawed his window-bar about that much. [*He holds up his thumb and finger a quarter of an inch apart.*]

THE GOVERNOR. I'll see him this afternoon. What's his name? Moaney! An old hand, I think?

WOODER. Yes, sir—fourth spell of penal. You'd think an

old lag like him would have had more sense by now. [*With pitying contempt.*] Occupied his mind, he said. Breaking in and breaking out—that's all they think about.

THE GOVERNOR. Who's next him?

WOODER. O'Cleary, sir.

THE GOVERNOR. The Irishman.

WOODER. Next him again there's that young fellow, Falder—star class—and next him old Clipton.

THE GOVERNOR. Ah, yes! "The philosopher." I want to see him about his eyes.

WOODER. Curious thing, sir: they seem to know when there's one of these tries at escape going on. It makes them restive—there's a regular wave going through them just now.

THE GOVERNOR. [*Meditatively*] Odd things—those waves. [*Turning to look at the prisoners exercising.*] Seem quiet enough out here!

WOODER. That Irishman, O'Cleary, began banging on his door this morning. Little thing like that's quite enough to upset the whole lot. They're just like dumb animals at times.

THE GOVERNOR. I've seen it with horses before thunder—it'll run right through cavalry lines.

[*The prison CHAPLAIN has entered. He is a dark-haired, ascetic man, in clerical undress, with a peculiarly steady, tight-lipped face and slow, cultured speech.*]

THE GOVERNOR. [*Holding up the saw*] Seen this, Miller?

THE CHAPLAIN. Useful-looking specimen.

THE GOVERNOR. Do for the Museum, eh! [*He goes to the cupboard and opens it, displaying to view a number of quaint ropes, hooks, and metal tools with labels tied on them.*] That'll do, thanks, Mr. Wooder.

WOODER. [*Saluting*] Thank you, sir. [*He goes out.*]

THE GOVERNOR. Account for the state of the men last day or two, Miller? Seems going through the whole place.

THE CHAPLAIN. No. I don't know of anything.

THE GOVERNOR. By the way, will you dine with us to-morrow?

THE CHAPLAIN. Christmas Day? Thanks very much.

THE GOVERNOR. Worries me to feel the men discontented. [*Gazing at the saw.*] Have to punish this poor devil. Can't help liking a man who tries to escape.

[*He places the saw in his pocket and locks the cupboard again.*]

THE CHAPLAIN. Extraordinary perverted will-power—some of them. Nothing to be done till it's broken.

THE GOVERNOR. And not much afterwards, I'm afraid. Ground too hard for golf? [WOODER comes in again.]

WOODER. Visitor to speak to you, sir. I told him it wasn't usual.

THE GOVERNOR. What about?

WOODER. Shall I put him off, sir?

THE GOVERNOR. [*Resignedly*] No, no. Let's see him. Don't go, Miller.

[WOODER motions to someone without, and as the visitor comes in withdraws.]

[*The visitor is COKESON, who is attired in a thick overcoat to the knees, woollen gloves, and carries a top hat.*]

COKESON. I'm sorry to trouble you. But it's about a young man you've got here.

THE GOVERNOR. We have a good many.

COKESON. Name of Falder, forgery. [*Producing a card, and handing it to the GOVERNOR.*] Firm of James and Walter How. Well known in the law.

THE GOVERNOR. [*Receiving the card—with a faint smile.*] What do you want to see me about, sir?

COKESON. [*Suddenly seeing the prisoners at exercise*] Why! what a sight!

THE GOVERNOR. Yes, we have that privilege from here; my office is being done up. [*Sitting down at his table.*] Now, please!

COKESON. [*Dragging his eyes with difficulty from the window*] I wanted to say a word to you; I shan't keep you long. [*Confidentially*] Fact is, I oughtn't to be here by rights. His sister came to me—he's got no father and mother—and she was in some distress. "My husband won't let me go and see him,"

she said; "says he's disgraced the family. And his other sister," she said, "is an invalid." And she asked me to come. Well, I take an interest in him. He was our junior—I go to the same chapel—and I didn't like to refuse.

THE GOVERNOR. I'm afraid he's not allowed a visitor yet—he's only here for his one month's separate confinement.

COKESON. You see, I saw him while he was shut up waiting for his trial and he was lonely.

THE GOVERNOR. [*With faint amusement*] Ring the bell—would you, Miller. [*To COKESON*] You'd like to hear what the doctor says about him, perhaps.

THE CHAPLAIN. [*Ringing the bell*] You are not accustomed to prisons, it would seem, sir.

COKESON. No. But it's a pitiful sight. He's quite a young fellow. I said to him: "Be patient," I said. "Patient!" he said. "A day," he said, "shut up in your cell thinking and brooding as I do, it's longer than a year outside, I can't help it," he said; "I try—but I'm built that way, Mr. Cokeson." And he held his hand up to his face. I could see the tears trickling through his fingers. It wasn't nice.

THE CHAPLAIN. He's a young man with rather peculiar eyes, isn't he? Not Church of England, I think?

COKESON. No.

THE CHAPLAIN. I know.

THE GOVERNOR. [*To WOODER, who has come in*] Ask the doctor to be good enough to come here for a minute. [*WOODER salutes, and goes out.*] Let's see, he's not married?

COKESON. No. [*Confidentially*] But there's a party he's very much attached to, not altogether com-il-fo. It's a sad story.

THE CHAPLAIN. If it wasn't for drink and women, sir, this prison might be closed.

COKESON. [*Looking at the CHAPLAIN over his spectacles*] Ye-es, but I wanted to tell you about that, special. It preys on his mind.

THE GOVERNOR. Well!

COKESON. Like this. The woman had a nahsty, spiteful

feller for a husband, and she'd left him. Fact is, she was going away with our young friend. It's not nice—but I've looked over it. Well, after the trial she said she'd earn her living apart, and wait for him to come out. That was a great consolation to him. But after a month she came to me—I *don't* know her personally—and she said: "I can't earn the children's living, let alone my own—I've got no friends. I'm obliged to keep out of everybody's way, else my husband'd get to know where I was. I'm very much reduced," she said. And she has lost flesh. "I'll have to go in the workhouse!" It's a painful story. I said to her: "No," I said, "not that! I've got a wife an' family, but sooner than you should do that I'll spare you a little myself." "Really," she said—she's a nice creature—"I don't like to take it from you. I think I'd better go back to my husband." Well, I know he's a nahsty, spiteful feller—drinks—but I didn't like to persuade her not to.

THE CHAPLAIN. Surely, no.

COKESON. Ye-es, but I'm sorry now. He's got his three years to serve. I *want* things to be pleasant for him.

THE CHAPLAIN. [*With a touch of impatience*] The Law hardly shares your view, I'm afraid.

COKESON. He's all alone there by himself. I'm afraid it'll turn him silly. And nobody wants that, I s'pose. He cried when I saw him. I don't like to see a man cry.

THE CHAPLAIN. It's a very rare thing for them to give way like that.

COKESON. [*Looking at him—in a tone of sudden dogged hostility*] I keep dogs.

THE CHAPLAIN. Indeed?

COKESON. Ye-es. And I say this: I wouldn't shut one of them up all by himself, week after week, not if he'd bit me all over.

THE CHAPLAIN. Unfortunately, the criminal is not a dog; he has a sense of right and wrong.

COKESON. But that's not the way to make him feel it.

THE CHAPLAIN. Ah! there I'm afraid we must differ.

COKESON. It's the same with dogs. If you treat 'em with

kindness they'll do anything for you; but to shut 'em up alone, it only makes 'em savage.

THE CHAPLAIN. Surely you should allow those who have had a little more experience than yourself to know what is best for prisoners.

COKESON. [*Doggedly*] I know this young feller, I've watched him for years. He's eutotic—got no stamina. His father died of consumption. I'm thinking of his future. If he's to be kept there shut up by himself, without a cat to keep him company, it'll do him harin. I said to him: "Where do you feel it?" "I can't tell you, Mr. Cokeson," he said, "but sometimes I could beat my head against the wall." It's not nice.

[*During this speech the DOCTOR has entered. He is a medium-sized, rather good-looking man, with a quick eye. He stands leaning against the window.*]

THE GOVERNOR. This gentleman thinks the separate is telling on Q 3007—Falder, young thin fellow, star class. What do you say, Doctor Clements?

THE DOCTOR. He doesn't like it, but it's not doing him any harm, it's only a month.

COKESON. But he was weeks before he came in here.

THE DOCTOR. We can always tell. He's lost no weight since he's been here.

COKESON. It's his state of mind I'm speaking of.

THE DOCTOR. His mind's all right so far. He's nervous, rather melancholy. I don't see signs of anything more. I'm watching him carefully.

COKESON. [*Nonplussed*] I'm glad to hear you say that.

THE CHAPLAIN. [*More suavely*] It's just at this period that we are able to make some impression on them, sir. I am speaking from my special standpoint.

COKESON. [*Turning bewildered to the GOVERNOR*] I don't want to be unpleasant, but I do feel it's awkward.

THE GOVERNOR. I'll make a point of seeing him to-day.

COKESON. I'm much obliged to you. I thought perhaps seeing him every day you wouldn't notice it.

THE GOVERNOR. [*Rather sharply*] If any sign of injury to his health shows itself his case will be reported at once. That's fully provided for. [*He rises.*]

COKESON. [*Following his own thoughts*] Of course, what you don't see doesn't trouble you; but I don't want to have him on my mind.

THE GOVERNOR. I think you may safely leave it to us, sir.

COKESON. [*Mollified and apologetic*] I thought you'd understand me. I'm a plain man—never set myself up against authority. [*Expanding to the CHAPLAIN.*] Nothing personal meant. Good-morning.

[*As he goes out the three officials do not look at each other, but their faces wear peculiar expressions. — quite*]

THE CHAPLAIN. Our friend seems to think that prison is a hospital.

COKESON. [*Returning suddenly with an apologetic air*] There's just one little thing. This woman—I suppose I mustn't ask you to let him see her. It'd be a rare treat for them both. He'll be thinking about her all the time. Of course she's not his wife. But he's quite safe in here. They're a pitiful couple. You couldn't make an exception?

THE GOVERNOR. [*Wearily*] As you say, my dear sir, I couldn't make an exception; he won't be allowed a visit till he goes to a convict prison.

COKESON. I see. [*Rather coldly.*] Sorry to have troubled you. [*He again goes out.*]

THE CHAPLAIN. [*Shrugging his shoulders*] The plain man indeed, poor fellow. Come and have some lunch, Clements?

[*He and the DOCTOR go out talking.*]

[*The GOVERNOR, with a sigh, sits down at his table and takes up a pen.*]

The curtain falls.

SCENE II

Part of the ground corridor of the prison. The walls are coloured with greenish distemper up to a stripe of deeper green about the height of a man's shoulder, and above this line are whitewashed. The floor is of blackened stones. Daylight is filtering through a heavily barred window at the end. The doors of four cells are visible. Each cell door has a little round peep-hole at the level of a man's eye, covered by a little round disc, which, raised upwards, affords a view of the cell. On the wall, close to each cell door, hangs a little square board with the prisoner's name, number, and record.

Overhead can be seen the iron structures of the first-floor and second-floor corridors.

The WARDER INSTRUCTOR, a bearded man in blue uniform, with an apron, and some dangling keys, is just emerging from one of the cells.

INSTRUCTOR. [*Speaking from the door into the cell*] I'll have another bit for you when that's finished.

O'CLEARY. [*Unseen—in an Irish voice*] Little doubt o' that, sirr.

INSTRUCTOR. [*Gossiping*] Well, you'd rather have it than nothing, I s'pose.

O'CLEARY. An' that's the blessed truth.

[*Sounds are heard of a cell door being closed and locked, and of approaching footsteps.*]

INSTRUCTOR. [*In a sharp, changed voice*] Look alive over it!
[*He shuts the cell door, and stands at attention.*]

[*The GOVERNOR comes walking down the corridor, followed by WOODER.*]

THE GOVERNOR. Anything to report?

INSTRUCTOR. [*Saluting*] Q 3007 [*He points to a cell*] is behind with his work, sir. He'll lose marks to-day.

[*The GOVERNOR nods and passes on to the end cell. The INSTRUCTOR goes away.*]

THE GOVERNOR. This is our maker of saws, isn't it?

[*He takes the saw from his pocket as WOODER throws open the door of the cell. The convict MOANEY is seen lying on his bed, athwart the cell, with his cap on. He springs up and stands in the middle of the cell. He is a raw-boned fellow, about fifty-six years old, with outstanding bat's ears and fierce, staring, steel-coloured eyes.*]

WOODER. Cap off! [MOANEY removes his cap.] Out here!

[MOANEY comes to the door.]

THE GOVERNOR. [*Beckoning him out into the corridor, and holding up the saw—with the manner of an officer speaking to a private*] Anything to say about this, my man? [MOANEY is silent.] Come!

MOANEY. It passed the time.

THE GOVERNOR. [*Pointing into the cell*] Not enough to do, eh?

MOANEY. It don't occupy your mind.

THE GOVERNOR. [*Tapping the saw*] You might find a better way than this.

MOANEY. [*Sullenly*] Well! What way! I must keep my hand in against the time I get out. What's the good of anything else to me at my time of life? [*With a gradual change to civility, as his tongue warms.*] Ye know that, sir. I'll be in again within a year or two, after I've done this lot. I don't want to disgrace meself when I'm out. You've got your pride keeping the prison smart; well, I've got mine. [*Seeing that the GOVERNOR is listening with interest, he goes on, pointing to the saw.*] I must be doin' a little o' this. It's no harm to any one. I was five weeks makin' that saw—a bit of all right it is, too; now I'll get cells, I suppose, or seven days' bread and water. You can't help it, sir, I know that—I quite put meself in your place.

THE GOVERNOR. Now, look here, Moaney, if I pass it over will you give me your word not to try it on again? Think!

[*He goes into the cell, walks to the end of it, mounts the stool, and tries the window-bars.*]

THE GOVERNOR. [*Returning*] Well?

MOANEY. [*Who has been reflecting*] I've got another six weeks to do in here, alone. I can't do it and think o' nothing. I must have something to interest me. You've made me a sporting offer, sir, but I can't pass my word about it. I shouldn't like to deceive a gentleman. [*Pointing into the cell*] Another four hours' steady work would have done it.

THE GOVERNOR. Yes, and what then? Caught, brought back, punishment. Five weeks' hard work to make this, and cells at the end of it, while they put a new bar to your window. Is it worth it, Moaney?

MOANEY. [*With a sort of fierceness*] Yes, it is.

THE GOVERNOR. [*Putting his hand to his brow*] Oh, well! Two days' cells—bread and water.

MOANEY. Thank 'e, sir. ✓

[*He turns quickly like an animal and slips into his cell.*

[*The GOVERNOR looks after him and shakes his head as WOODER closes and locks the cell door.*

THE GOVERNOR. Open Clipton's cell.

[*WOODER opens the door of CLIPTON's cell. CLIPTON is sitting on a stool just inside the door, at work on a pair of trousers. He is a small, thick, oldish man, with an almost shaven head, and smouldering little dark eyes behind smoked spectacles. He gets up and stands motionless in the doorway, peering at his visitors.*

THE GOVERNOR. [*Beckoning*] Come out here a minute, Clipton.

[*CLIPTON, with a sort of dreadful quietness, comes into the corridor, the needle and thread in his hand. The GOVERNOR signs to WOODER, who goes into the cell and inspects it carefully.*

THE GOVERNOR. How are your eyes?

CLIPTON. I don't complain of them. I don't see the sun here. [*He makes a stealthy movement, protruding his neck a little.*] There's just one thing, Mr. Governor, as you're spcaking to me. I wish you'd ask the ^{man}cove next door here to keep a bit quieter.

THE GOVERNOR. What's the matter? I don't want any tales, Clipton.

CLIPTON. He keeps me awake. I don't know who he is.

[*With contempt*] One of this *star* class, I expect. Oughtn't to be here with *us*.

THE GOVERNOR. [*Quietly*] Quite right, Clipton. He'll be moved when there's a cell vacant.

CLIPTON. He knocks about like a wild beast in the early morning. I'm not used to it—stops me getting my sleep out. In the evening too. It's not fair, Mr. Governor, as you're speaking to me. Sleep's the comfort I've got here; I'm entitled to take it out full.

[WOODER comes out of the cell, and instantly, as though extinguished, CLIPTON moves with stealthy suddenness back into his cell.

WOODER. All right, sir.

[*The GOVERNOR nods. The door is closed and locked.*

THE GOVERNOR. Which is the man who banged on his door this morning?

WOODER. [*Going towards O'CLEARY's cell*] This one, sir; O'Cleary. [*He lifts the disc and glances through the peep-hole.*

THE GOVERNOR. Open.

[WOODER throws open the door. O'CLEARY, who is seated at a little table by the door as if listening, springs up and stands at attention just inside the doorway. He is a broad-faced, middle-aged man, with a wide, thin, flexible mouth, and little holes under his high cheek-bones.

THE GOVERNOR. Where's the joke, O'Cleary?

O'CLEARY. The joke, your honour? I've not seen one for a long time.

THE GOVERNOR. Banging on your door?

O'CLEARY. Oh! that!

THE GOVERNOR. It's womanish.

O'CLEARY. An' it's that I'm becoming this two months past.

THE GOVERNOR. Anything to complain of?

O'CLEARY. No, sirr.

THE GOVERNOR. You're an old hand; you ought to know better.

O'CLEARY. Yes, I've been through it all.

THE GOVERNOR. You've got a youngster next door; you'll upset him.

O'CLEARY. It cam' over me, your honour. I can't always be the same steady man.

THE GOVERNOR. Work all right?

O'CLEARY. [*Taking up a rush mat he is making*] Oh! I can do it on my head. It's the miserablest stuff—don't take the brains of a mouse. [*Working his mouth.*] It's here I feel it—the want of a little noise—a terrible little wud aise me.

THE GOVERNOR. You know as well as I do that if you were out in the shops you wouldn't be allowed to talk.

O'CLEARY. [*With a look of profound meaning*] Not with my mouth.

THE GOVERNOR. Well, then?

O'CLEARY. But it's the great conversation I'd be havin'.

THE GOVERNOR. [*With a smile*] Well, no more conversation on your door.

O'CLEARY. No, sirr, I wud not have the little wit to repate meself.

THE GOVERNOR. [*Turning*] Good-night.

O'CLEARY. Good-night, your honour.

[*He turns into his cell. The GOVERNOR shuts the door.*]

THE GOVERNOR. [*Looking at the record card*] Can't help liking the poor blackguard.

WOODER. He's an amiable man, sir.

THE GOVERNOR. [*Pointing down the corridor*] Ask the doctor to come here, Mr. Wooder.

[*WOODER salutes and goes away down the corridor.*]

[*The GOVERNOR goes to the door of FALDER's cell. He raises his uninjured hand to uncover the peep-hole; but, without uncovering it, shakes his head and drops his hand; then, after scrutinizing the record board, he opens the cell door. FALDER, who is standing against it, lurches forward, with a gasp.*]

THE GOVERNOR. [*Beckoning him out*] Now tell me; can't you settle down, Falder?

FALDER. [*In a breathless voice*] Yes, sir.

THE GOVERNOR. You know what I mean? It's no good running your head against a stone wall, is it?

FALDER. No, sir.

THE GOVERNOR. Well, come.

FALDER. I try, sir.

THE GOVERNOR. Can't you sleep?

FALDER. Very little. Between two o'clock and getting up's the worst time.

THE GOVERNOR. How's that?

FALDER. [*His lips twitch with a sort of smile*] I don't know, sir. I was always nervous. [*Suddenly voluble.*] Everything seems to get such a size then. I feel I'll never get out as long as I live.

THE GOVERNOR. That's morbid, my lad. Pull yourself together.

FALDER. [*With an equally sudden dogged resentment*] Yes—I've got to——

THE GOVERNOR. Think of all these other fellows.

FALDER. They're used to it.

THE GOVERNOR. They all had to go through it once for the first time, just as you're doing now.

FALDER. Yes, sir, I shall get to be like them in time, I suppose.

THE GOVERNOR. [*Rather taken aback*] H'm! Well! That rests with you. Now, come. Set your mind to it, like a good fellow. You're still quite young. A man can make himself what he likes.

FALDER. [*Wistfully*] Yes, sir.

THE GOVERNOR. Take a good hold of yourself. Do you read?

FALDER. I don't take the words in. [*Hanging his head.*] I know it's no good; but I can't help thinking of what's going on outside.

THE GOVERNOR. Private trouble?

FALDER. Yes.

THE GOVERNOR. You mustn't think about it.

FALDER. [*Looking back at his cell*] How can I help it, sir?

[*He suddenly becomes motionless as WOODER and the DOCTOR approach. The GOVERNOR motions to him to go back into his cell.*

FALDER. [*Quick and low*] I'm quite right in my head, sir.

[*He goes back into his cell.*

THE GOVERNOR. [*To the DOCTOR*] Just go in and see him, Clements.

[*The DOCTOR goes into the cell. The GOVERNOR pushes the door to, nearly closing it, and walks towards the window.*

WOODER. [*Following*] Sorry you should be troubled like this, sir. Very contented lot of men, on the whole.

THE GOVERNOR. [*Shortly*] You think so?

WOODER. Yes, sir. It's Christmas doing it, in my opinion.

THE GOVERNOR. [*To himself*] Queer, that!

WOODER. Beg pardon, sir?

THE GOVERNOR. Christmas!

[*He turns towards the window, leaving WOODER looking at him with a sort of pained anxiety.*

WOODER. [*Suddenly*] Do you think we make show enough, sir? If you'd like us to have more holly?

THE GOVERNOR. Not at all, Mr. Wooder.

WOODER. Very good, sir.

[*The DOCTOR has come out of FALDER's cell, and the GOVERNOR beckons to him.*

THE GOVERNOR. Well?

THE DOCTOR. I can't make anything much of him. He's nervous, of course.

THE GOVERNOR. Is there any sort of case to report? Quite frankly, Doctor.

THE DOCTOR. Well, I don't think the separate's doing him any good; but then I could say the same of a lot of them—they'd get on better in the shops, there's no doubt.

THE GOVERNOR. You mean you'd have to recommend others?

THE DOCTOR. A dozen at least. It's on his nerves. There's nothing tangible. This fellow here [*pointing to O'CLEARY's*

cell], for instance—feels it just as much, in his way. If I once get away from physical facts—I shan't know where I am. Conscientiously, sir, I don't know how to differentiate him. He hasn't lost weight. Nothing wrong with his eyes. His pulse is good. Talks all right. It's only another week before he goes.

THE GOVERNOR. It doesn't amount to melancholia?

THE DOCTOR. [*Shaking his head*] I can report on him if you like; but if I do I ought to report on others.

THE GOVERNOR. I see. [*Looking towards FALDER's cell.*] The poor devil must just stick it then.

[*As he says this he looks absently at WOODER.*]

WOODER. Beg pardon, sir?

[*For answer the GOVERNOR stares at him, turns on his heel, and walks away.* [*There is a sound as of beating on metal.*]

THE GOVERNOR. [*Stopping*] Mr. Wooder?

WOODER. Banging on his door, sir. I thought we should have more of that.

[*He hurries forward, passing the GOVERNOR, who follows slowly.*]

The curtain falls.

SCENE III

FALDER's cell, a whitewashed space thirteen feet broad by seven deep, and nine feet high, with a rounded ceiling. The floor is of shiny blackened bricks. The barred window, with a ventilator, is high up in the middle of the end wall. In the middle of the opposite end wall is the narrow door. In a corner are the mattress and bedding rolled up (two blankets, two sheets, and a coverlet). Above them is a quarter-circular wooden shelf, on which is a Bible and several little devotional books, piled in a symmetrical pyramid; there are also a black hair-brush, tooth-brush, and a bit of soap. In another corner is the wooden frame of a bed, standing on end. There is a dark ventilator under the window, and another over the door. FALDER's work (a shirt to

which he is putting button-holes) is hung to a nail on the wall over a small wooden table, on which the novel "Lorna Doone" lies open. Low down in the corner by the door is a thick glass screen, about a foot square, covering the gas-jet let into the wall. There is also a wooden stool, and a pair of shoes beneath it. Three bright round tins are set under the window.

In fast-failing daylight, FALDER, in his stockings, is seen standing motionless, with his head inclined towards the door, listening. He moves a little closer to the door, his stockinged feet making no noise. He stops at the door. He is trying harder and harder to hear something, any little thing that is going on outside. He springs suddenly upright—as if at a sound—and remains perfectly motionless. Then, with a heavy sigh, he moves to his work, and stands looking at it, with his head down; he does a stitch or two, having the air of a man so lost in sadness that each stitch is, as it were, a coming to life. Then, turning abruptly, he begins pacing the cell, moving his head, like an animal pacing its cage. He stops again at the door, listens, and, placing the palms of his hands against it with his fingers spread out, leans his forehead against the iron. Turning from it presently, he moves slowly back towards the window tracing his way with his finger along the top line of the distemper that runs round the walls. He stops under the window, and, picking up the lid of one of the tins, peers into it, as if trying to make a companion of his own face. It has grown very nearly dark. Suddenly the lid falls out of his hand with a clatter—the only sound that has broken the silence—and he stands staring intently at the wall where the stuff of the shirt is hanging rather white in the darkness—he seems to be seeing somebody or something there. There is a sharp tap and click; the cell light behind the glass screen has been turned up. The cell is brightly lighted. FALDER is seen gasping for breath. A sound from far away, as of distant, dull beating on thick metal, is suddenly audible. FALDER shrinks back, not able to bear this sudden clamour. But the sound grows, as though some great tumbril were rolling towards the cell. And gradually it seems to hypnotize him. He begins creeping inch by inch nearer to the

door. The banging sound, travelling from cell to cell, draws closer and closer; FALDER'S hands are seen moving as if his spirit had already joined in this beating, and the sound swells till it seems to have entered the very cell. He suddenly raises his clenched fists. Panting violently, he flings himself at his door, and beats on it.

The curtain falls.

ACT IV

The scene is again COKESON's room, at a few minutes to ten of a March morning, two years later. The doors are all open. SWEEDLE, now blessed with a sprouting moustache, is getting the offices ready. He arranges papers on COKESON's table; then goes to a covered washstand, raises the lid, and looks at himself in the mirror. While he is gazing his fill RUTH HONEYWILL comes in through the outer office and stands in the doorway. There seems a kind of exultation and excitement behind her habitual impassivity.

SWEEDLE. [*Suddenly seeing her, and dropping the lid of the washstand with a bang*] Hello! It's you!

RUTH. Yes.

SWEEDLE. There's only me here! They don't waste their time hurrying down in the morning. Why, it must be two years since we had the pleasure of seeing you. [*Nervously*] What have you been doing with yourself?

RUTH. [*Sardonically*] Living.

SWEEDLE. [*Impressed*] If you want to see him [*he points to COKESON's chair*], he'll be here directly—never misses—not much. [*Delicately*] I hope our friend's back from the country. His time's been up these three months, if I remember. [*RUTH nods.*] I was awful sorry about that. The governor made a mistake—if you ask me.

RUTH. He did.

SWEEDLE. He ought to have given him a chanst. And, I say, the judge ought to ha' let him go after that. They've forgot what human nature's like. Whereas *we* know.

[*RUTH gives him a honeyed smile.*]

SWEEDLE. They come down on you like a cartload of bricks, flatten you out, and when you don't swell up again they com-

plain of it. I know 'em—seen a lot of that sort of thing in my time. [*He shakes his head in the plenitude of wisdom.*] Why, only the other day the governor—

[*But COKESON has come in through the outer office; brisk with east wind, and decidedly greyer.*

COKESON. [*Drawing off his coat and gloves*] Why! it's you! [*Then motioning SWEEDLE out, and closing the door*] Quite a stranger! Must be two years. D'you want to see me? I can give you a minute. Sit down! Family well?

RUTH. Yes. I'm not living where I was.

COKESON. [*Eyeing her askance*] I hope things are more comfortable at home.

RUTH. I couldn't stay with Honeywill, after all.

COKESON. You haven't done anything rash, I hope. I should be sorry if you'd done anything rash.

RUTH. I've kept the children with me.

COKESON. [*Beginning to feel that things are not so jolly as he had hoped*] Well, I'm glad to have seen you. You've not heard from the young man, I suppose, since he came out?

RUTH. Yes, I ran across him yesterday.

COKESON. I hope he's well.

RUTH. [*With sudden fierceness*] He can't get anything to do. It's dreadful to see him. He's just skin and bone.

COKESON. [*With genuine concern*] Dear me! I'm sorry to hear that. [*On his guard again*] Didn't they find him a place when his time was up?

RUTH. He was only there three weeks. *the new that he* It got out. *not too*

COKESON. I'm sure I don't know what I can do for you. *would*
I don't like to be snubby. *out*

RUTH. I can't bear his being like that.

COKESON. [*Scanning her not unprosperous figure*] I know his relations aren't very *friendly* *forthly* about him. Perhaps you can do something for him, till he finds his feet.

RUTH. Not now. I could have—but not *now*.

COKESON. I don't understand.

RUTH. [*Proudly*] I've seen *him* again—that's all over.

COKESON. [*Staring at her—disturbed*] I'm a family man—I don't want to hear anything unpleasant. Excuse me—I'm very busy.

RUTH. I'd have gone home to my people in the country long ago, but they've never got over me marrying Honeywill. I never was waywise, Mr. Cokeson, but I'm proud. I was only a girl, you see, when I married him. I thought the world of him, of course . . . he used to come travelling to our farm.

COKESON. [*Regretfully*] I did hope you'd have got on better, after you saw me.

RUTH. He used me worse than ever. He couldn't break my nerve, but I lost my health; and then he began knocking the children about. . . . I couldn't stand that. I wouldn't go back now, if he were dying.

COKESON. [*Who has risen and is shifting about as though dodging a stream of lava*] We mustn't be violent, must we?

RUTH. [*Smouldering*] A man that can't behave better than that—— [*There is silence.*]

COKESON. [*Fascinated in spite of himself*] Then there you were! And what did you do then?

RUTH. [*With a shrug*] Tried the same as when I left him before . . . making shirts . . . cheap things. It was the best I could get, but I never made more than ten shillings a week, buying my own cotton and working all day; I hardly ever got to bed till past twelve. I kept at it for nine months. [*Fiercely*] Well, I'm not fit for that; I wasn't made for it. I'd rather die.

COKESON. My dear woman! We mustn't talk like that.

RUTH. It was starvation for the children too—after what they'd always had. I soon got not to care. I used to be too tired. [*She is silent.*]

COKESON. [*With fearful curiosity*] And—what happened then?

RUTH. [*With a laugh*] My employer happened then—he's happened ever since.

COKESON. Dear! Oh dear! I never came across a thing like this.

RUTH. [*Dully*] He's treated me all right. But I've done with that. [*Suddenly her lips begin to quiver, and she hides them with the back of her hand.*] I never thought I'd see him again, you see. It was just a chance I met him by Hyde Park. We went in there and sat down, and he told me all about himself. Oh! Mr. Cokeson, give him another chance.

COKESON. [*Greatly disturbed*] Then you've both lost your livings! What a horrible position!

RUTH. If he could only get here—where there's nothing to find out about him!

COKESON. We can't have anything ^{unusual} derogative to the firm.

RUTH. I've no one else to go to.

COKESON. I'll speak to the partners, but I don't think they'll take him, under the circumstances. I don't really.

RUTH. He came with me; he's down there in the street.

[*She points to the window.*]

COKESON. [*On his dignity*] He shouldn't have done that until he's sent for. [*Then softening at the look on her face*] We've got a vacancy, as it happens, but I can't promise anything.

RUTH. It would be the saving of him.

COKESON. Well, I'll do what I can, but I'm not sanguine. Now tell him that I don't want him here till I see how things are. Leave your address? [*Repeating her.*] 83, Mullingar Street? [*He notes it on blotting-paper.*] Good-morning.

RUTH. Thank you. [*She moves towards the door, turns as if to speak but does not, and goes away.*]

COKESON. [*Wiping his head and forehead with a large white cotton handkerchief*] What a business! [*Then, looking amongst his papers, he sounds his bell.* SWEEDLE answers it.]

COKESON. Was that young Richards coming here to-day after the clerk's place?

SWEEDLE. Yes.

COKESON. Well, keep him in the air; I don't want to see him yet.

SWEEDLE. What shall I tell him, sir?

COKESON. [*With asperity*] Invent something. Use your brains. Don't stump him off altogether.

SWEEDLE. Shall I tell him that we've got illness, sir?

COKESON. No! Nothing untrue. Say I'm not here to-day.

SWEEDLE. Yes, sir. Keep him hankering?

COKESON. Exactly. And look here. You remember Falder? I may be having him round to see me. Now, treat him like you'd have him treat you in a similar position.

SWEEDLE. I naturally should do.

COKESON. That's right. When a man's down never hit 'im. 'Tisn't necessary. Give him a hand up. That's a metaphor I recommend to you in life. It's sound policy.

SWEEDLE. Do you think the governors will take him on again, sir?

COKESON. Can't say anything about that. [*At the sound of someone having entered the outer office*] Who's there?

SWEEDLE. [*Going to the door and looking*] It's Falder, sir.

COKESON. [*Vexed*] Dear me! That's very naughty of her. Tell him to call again. I don't want——

[*He breaks off as FALDER comes in. FALDER is thin, pale, older, his eyes have grown more restless. His clothes are very worn and loose.*

[*SWEEDLE, nodding cheerfully, withdraws.*

COKESON. Glad to see you. You're rather previous. [*Trying to keep things pleasant.*] Shake hands! She's striking while the iron's hot. [*He wipes his forehead.*] I don't blame her. She's anxious.

[*FALDER timidly takes COKESON's hand and glances towards the partners' door.*

COKESON. No—not yet! Sit down! [*FALDER sits in the chair at the side of COKESON's table, on which he places his cap.*] Now you are here I'd like you to give me a little account of yourself. [*Looking at him over his spectacles.*] How's your health?

FALDER. I'm alive, Mr. Cokeson.

COKESON. [*Preoccupied*] I'm glad to hear that. About this matter. I don't like doing anything out of the ordinary; it's

not my habit. I'm a plain man, and I want everything smooth and straight. But I promised your friend to speak to the partners, and I always keep my word.

FALDER. I just want a chance, Mr. Cokeson. I've paid for that job a thousand times and more. I have, sir. No one knows. They say I weighed more when I came out than when I went in. They couldn't weigh me here [*he touches his head*] or here [*he touches his heart, and gives a sort of laugh*]. Till last night I'd thought there was nothing in here at all.

COKESON. [*Concerned*] You've not got heart disease?

FALDER. Oh! they passed me sound enough.

COKESON. But they got you a place, didn't they?

FALDER. Yes; very good people, knew all about it—very kind to me. I thought I was going to get on first-rate. But one day, all of a sudden, the other clerks got wind of it. . . . I couldn't stick it, Mr. Cokeson, I couldn't, sir.

COKESON. Easy, my dear fellow, easy.

FALDER. I had one small job after that, but it didn't last.

COKESON. How was that?

FALDER. It's no good deceiving you, Mr. Cokeson. The fact is, I seem to be struggling against a thing that's all round me. I can't explain it: it's as if I was in a net; as fast as I cut it here, it grows up there. I didn't act as I ought to have, about references; but what are you to do? You must have them. And that made me afraid, and I left. In fact, I'm—I'm afraid all the time now.

[*He bows his head and leans dejectedly silent over the table.*]

COKESON. I feel for you—I do really. Aren't your sisters going to do anything for you?

FALDER. One's in consumption. And the other—

COKESON. Ye . . . es. She told me her husband wasn't quite pleased with you.

FALDER. When I went there—they were at supper—my sister wanted to give me a kiss—I know. But he just looked at her, and said: "What have you come for?" Well, I pocketed my pride and I said: "Aren't you going to give me your hand,

Jim? Cis is, I know," I said. "Look here!" he said, "that's all very well, but we'd better come to an understanding. I've been expecting you, and I've made up my mind. I'll give you twenty-five pounds to go to Canada with." "I see," I said—"good riddance! No, thanks; keep your twenty-five pounds." Friendship's a queer thing when you've been where I have.

COKESON. I understand. Will you take the twenty-five pound from me? [*Flustered, as FALDER regards him with a queer smile.*] Quite without prejudice; I meant it kindly.

FALDER. They wouldn't let me in.

COKESON. Oh! Ah! No! You aren't looking the thing.

FALDER. I've slept in the Park three nights this week. The dawns aren't all poetry there. But meeting her—I feel a different man this morning. I've often thought the being fond of her's the best thing about me; it's sacred, somehow—and yet it did for me. That's queer, isn't it?

COKESON. I'm sure we're all very sorry for you.

FALDER. That's what I've found, Mr. Cokeson. Awfully sorry for me. [*With quiet bitterness*] But it doesn't do to associate with criminals!

COKESON. Come, come, it's no use calling yourself names. That never did a man any good. Put a face on it.

FALDER. It's easy enough to put a face on it, sir, when you're independent. Try it when you're down like me. They talk about giving you your deserts. Well, I think I've had just a bit over.

COKESON. [*Eyeing him askance over his spectacles*] I hope they haven't made a Socialist of you.

[*FALDER is suddenly still, as if brooding over his past self; he utters a peculiar laugh.*]

COKESON. You must give them credit for the best intentions. Really you must. Nobody wishes you harm, I'm sure.

FALDER. I believe that, Mr. Cokeson. Nobody wishes you harm, but they down you all the same. This feeling—[*He stares round him, as though at something closing in.*] It's crushing me. [*With sudden impersonality*] I know it is.

COKESON. [*Horribly disturbed*] There's nothing there! We must try and take it quiet. I'm sure I've often had you in my prayers. Now leave it to me. I'll use my gumption and take 'em when they're jolly.

[*As he speaks the two partners come in.*]

COKESON. [*Rather disconcerted, but trying to put them all at ease*] I didn't expect you quite so soon. I've just been having a talk with this young man. I think you'll remember him.

JAMES. [*With a grave, keen look*] Quite well. How are you, Falder?

WALTER. [*Holding out his hand almost timidly*] Very glad to see you again, Falder.

FALDER. [*Who has recovered his self-control, takes the hand*] Thank you, sir.

COKESON. Just a word, Mr. James. [*To FALDER, pointing to the clerks' office*] You might go in there a minute. You know your way. Our junior won't be coming this morning. His wife's just had a little family.

[*FALDER goes uncertainly out into the clerks' office.*]

COKESON. [*Confidentially*] I'm bound to tell you all about it. He's quite penitent. But there's a prejudice against him. And you're not seeing him to advantage this morning; he's undernourished. It's very trying to go without your dinner.

JAMES. Is that so, Cokeson?

COKESON. I wanted to ask you. He's had his lesson. Now we know all about him, and we want a clerk. There's a young fellow applying, but I'm keeping him in the air. ✓

JAMES. A gaol-bird in the office, Cokeson? I don't see it.

WALTER. "The rolling of the chariot-wheels of Justice!" I've never got that out of my head.

JAMES. I've nothing to reproach myself with in this affair. What's he been doing since he came out?

COKESON. He's had one or two places, but he hasn't kept them. He's sensitive—quite natural. Seems to fancy everybody's down on him.

JAMES. Bad sign. Don't like the fellow—never did from the first. "Weak character" 's written all over him.

WALTER. I think we owe him a leg up.

JAMES. He brought it all on himself.

WALTER. The doctrine of full responsibility doesn't quite hold in these days.

JAMES. [*Rather grimly*] You'll find it safer to hold it for all that, my boy.

WALTER. For oneself, yes—not for other people, thanks.

JAMES. Well! I don't want to be hard.

COKESON. I'm glad to hear you say that. He seems to see something [*spreading his arms*] round him. 'Tisn't healthy.

JAMES. What about that woman he was mixed up with? I saw someone uncommonly like her outside as we came in.

COKESON. *That!* Well, I can't keep anything from you. He has met her.

JAMES. Is she with her husband?

COKESON. No.

JAMES. Falder living with her, I suppose?

COKESON. [*Desperately trying to retain the new-found jollity*] I don't know that of my own knowledge. 'Tisn't my business.

JAMES. It's *our* business, if we're going to engage him, Cokeson.

COKESON. [*Reluctantly*] I ought to tell you, perhaps. I've had the party here this morning.

JAMES. I thought so. [*To WALTER*] No, my dear boy, it won't do. Too shady altogether!

COKESON. The two things together make it very awkward for you—I see that.

WALTER. [*Tentatively*] I don't quite know what we have to do with his private life.

JAMES. No, no! He must make a clean sheet of it, or he can't come here

WALTER. Poor devil!

COKESON. Will you have him in? [*And as JAMES nods*] I think I can get him to see reason.

JAMES. [*Grimly*] You can leave that to me, Cokeson.

WALTER. [*To JAMES, in a low voice, while COKESON is summoning FALDER*] His whole future may depend on what we do, dad.

[*FALDER comes in. He has pulled himself together, and presents a steady front.*]

JAMES. Now look here, Falder. My son and I want to give you another chance; but there are two things I must say to you. In the first place: It's no good coming here as a victim. If you've any notion that you've been unjustly treated—get rid of it. You can't play fast and loose with morality and hope to go scot-free. If society didn't take care of itself, nobody would—the sooner you realize that the better.

FALDER. Yes, sir; but—may I say something?

JAMES. Well?

FALDER. I had a lot of time to think it over in prison. [*He stops.*]

COKESON. [*Encouraging him*] I'm sure you did.

FALDER. There were all sorts there. And what I mean, sir, is, that if we'd been treated differently the first time, and put under somebody that could look after us a bit, and not put in prison, not a quarter of us would ever have got there.

JAMES. [*Shaking his head*] I'm afraid I've very grave doubts of that, Falder.

FALDER. [*With a gleam of malice*] Yes, sir, so I found.

JAMES. My good fellow, don't forget that you began it.

FALDER. I never wanted to do wrong.

JAMES. Perhaps not. But you did.

FALDER. [*With all the bitterness of his past suffering*] It's knocked me out of time. [*Pulling himself up.*] That is, I mean, I'm not what I was.

JAMES. This isn't encouraging for us, Falder.

COKESON. He's putting it awkwardly, Mr. James.

FALDER. [*Throwing over his caution from the intensity of his feeling*] I mean it, Mr. Cokeson.

JAMES. Now, lay aside all those thoughts, Falder, and look to the future.

FALDER. [*Almost eagerly*] Yes, sir, but you don't understand what prison is. It's here it gets you. [*He grips his chest.*]

COKESON. [*In a whisper to JAMES*] I told you he wanted nourishment.

WALTER. Yes, but, my dear fellow, that'll pass away. Time's merciful.

FALDER. [*With his face twitching*] I hope so, sir.

JAMES. [*Much more gently*] Now, my boy, what you've got to do is to put all the past behind you and build yourself up a steady reputation. And that brings me to the second thing. This woman you were mixed up with—you must give us your word, you know, to have done with that. There's no chance of your keeping straight if you're going to begin your future with such a relationship.

FALDER. [*Looking from one to the other with a hunted expression*] But, sir . . . but, sir . . . it's the one thing I looked forward to all that time. And she too . . . I couldn't find her before last night.

[*During this and what follows COKESON becomes more and more uneasy.*]

JAMES. This is painful, Falder. But you must see for yourself that it's impossible for a firm like this to close its eyes to everything. Give us this proof of your resolve to keep straight, and you can come back—not otherwise.

FALDER. [*After staring at JAMES, suddenly stiffens himself*] I couldn't give her up. I couldn't! Oh, sir! I'm all she's got to look to. And I'm sure she's all I've got.

JAMES. I'm very sorry, Falder, but I must be firm. It's for the benefit of you both in the long run. No good can come of this connection. It was the cause of all your disaster.

FALDER. But, sir, it means—having gone through all that—getting broken up—my nerves are in an awful state—for nothing. I did it for her.

JAMES. Come! If she's anything of a woman she'll see it for herself. She won't want to drag you down further. If there

were a prospect of your being able to marry her—it might be another thing.

FALDER. It's not my fault, sir, that she couldn't get rid of him—she would have if she could. That's been the whole trouble from the beginning. [*Looking suddenly at WALTER.*] . . . If anybody would help her! It's only money wanted now, I'm sure.

COKESON. [*Breaking in, as WALTER hesitates, and is about to speak*] I don't think we need consider that—it's rather far-fetched.

FALDER. [*To WALTER, appealing*] He must have given her full cause since; she could prove that he drove her to leave him.

WALTER. I'm inclined to do what you say, Falder, if it can be managed.

FALDER. Oh, sir! [*He goes to the window and looks down into the street.*]

COKESON. [*Hurriedly*] You don't take me, Mr. Walter. I have my reasons.

FALDER. [*From the window*] She's down there, sir. Will you see her? I can beckon to her from here.

[*WALTER hesitates, and looks from COKESON to JAMES.*]

JAMES. [*With a sharp nod*] Yes, let her come.

[*FALDER beckons from the window.*]

COKESON. [*In a low fluster to JAMES and WALTER*] No, Mr. James. She's not been quite what she ought to ha' been, while this young man's been away. She's lost her chance. We can't consult how to swindle the Law.

[*FALDER has come from the window. The three men look at him in a sort of awed silence.*]

FALDER. [*With instinctive apprehension of some change—looking from one to the other*] There's been nothing between us, sir, to prevent it. . . . What I said at the trial was true. And last night we only just sat in the Park.

[*SWEEDLE comes in from the outer office.*]

COKESON. What is it?

SWEEDLE. Mrs. Honeywill.

[*There is silence.*]

JAMES. Show her in.

[RUTH comes slowly in, and stands stoically with FALDER on one side and the three men on the other. No one speaks. COKESON turns to his table, bending over his papers as though the burden of the situation were forcing him back into his accustomed groove.]

JAMES. [Sharply] Shut the door there. [SWEEDIE shuts the door.] We've asked you to come up because there are certain facts to be faced in this matter. I understand you have only just met Falder again.

RUTH. Yes—only yesterday.

JAMES. He's told us about himself, and we're very sorry for him. I've promised to take him back here if he'll make a fresh start. [Looking steadily at RUTH.] This is a matter that requires courage, ma'am.

[RUTH, who is looking at FALDER, begins to twist her hands in front of her as though prescient of disaster.]

FALDER. Mr. Walter How is good enough to say that he'll help us to get a divorce.

[RUTH flashes a startled glance at JAMES and WALTER.]

JAMES. I don't think that's practicable, Falder.

FALDER. But, sir——!

JAMES. [Steadily] Now, Mrs. Honeywill. You're fond of him.

RUTH. Yes, sir; I love him. [She looks miserably at FALDER.]

JAMES. Then you don't want to stand in his way, do you?

RUTH. [In a faint voice] I could take care of him.

JAMES. The best way you can take care of him will be to give him up.

FALDER. Nothing shall make me give you up. You can get a divorce. There's been nothing between us, has there?

RUTH. [Mournfully shaking her head—without looking at him] No.

FALDER. We'll keep apart till it's over, sir; if you'll only help us—we promise.

JAMES. [To RUTH] You see the thing plainly, don't you? You see what I mean?

RUTH. [*Just above a whisper*] Yes.

COKESON. [*To himself*] There's a dear woman.

JAMES. The situation is impossible.

RUTH. Must I, sir?

JAMES. [*Forcing himself to look at her*] I put it to you, ma'am.
His future is in your hands.

RUTH. [*Miserably*] I want to do the best for him.

JAMES. [*A little huskily*] That's right, that's right!

FALDER. I don't understand. You're not going to give me
up—after all this? There's something—— [*Starting forward to*

JAMES.] Sir, I swear solemnly there's been nothing between us.

JAMES. I believe you, Falder. Come, my lad, be as plucky
as she is.

FALDER. Just now you were going to help us. [*He stares at
RUTH, who is standing absolutely still; his face and hands twitch
and quiver as the truth dawns on him.*] What is it? You've not
been——

WALTER. Father!

JAMES. [*Hurriedly*] There, there! That'll do, that'll do!
I'll give you your chance, Falder. Don't let me know what you
do with yourselves, that's all.

FALDER. [*As if he has not heard*] Ruth?

[*RUTH looks at him; and FALDER covers his face with his
hands. There is silence.*

COKESON. [*Suddenly*] There's someone out there. [*To
RUTH.*] Go in here. You'll feel better by yourself for a minute.

[*He points to the clerks' room and moves towards the outer office.
FALDER does not move. RUTH puts out her hand timidly. He
shrinks back from the touch. She turns and goes miserably into the
clerks' room. With a brusque movement he follows, seizing her by
the shoulder just inside the doorway. COKESON shuts the door*]

JAMES. [*Pointing to the outer office*] Get rid of that, who ever
it is.

SWEEDLE. [*Opening the office door, in a scared voice*]
Detective-Sergeant Wister.

[*The detective enters, and closes the door behind him.*

WISTER. Sorry to disturb you, sir. A clerk you had here, two years and a half ago. I arrested him in this room.

JAMES. What about him?

WISTER. I thought perhaps I might get his whereabouts from you. *[There is an awkward silence.]*

COKESON. *[Pleasantly, coming to the rescue]* We're not responsible for his movements; you know that.

JAMES. What do you want with him?

WISTER. He's failed to report himself lately.

WALTER. Has he to keep in touch with the police then?

WISTER. We're bound to know his whereabouts. I dare say we shouldn't interfere, sir, but we've just heard there's a serious matter of obtaining employment with a forged reference. What with the two things together—we must have him.

[Again there is silence. WALTER and COKESON steal glances at JAMES, who stands staring steadily at the detective.]

COKESON. *[Expansively]* We're very busy at the moment. If you could make it convenient to call again we might be able to tell you then.

JAMES. *[Decisively]* I'm a servant of the Law, but I dislike peaching. In fact, I can't do such a thing. If you want him you must find him without us.

[As he speaks his eye falls on FALDER's cap, still lying on the table, and his face contracts.]

WISTER. *[Noting the gesture—quietly]* Very good, sir. I ought to warn you that sheltering—

JAMES. I shelter no one. But you mustn't come here and ask questions which it's not my business to answer.

WISTER. *[Dryly]* I won't trouble you further then, gentlemen.

COKESON. I'm sorry we couldn't give you the information. You quite understand, don't you? Good-morning!

[WISTER turns to go, but instead of going to the door of the outer office he goes to the door of the clerks' room.]

COKESON. The other door . . . the other door!

[WISTER opens the clerks' door. RUTH's voice is heard: "Oh, do!" and FALDER's: "I can't!" There is a little pause; then,

with sharp fright, RUTH says: "Who's that?" WISTER has gone in. *[The three men look aghast at the door.]*

WISTER. *[From within]* Keep back, please!

[He comes swiftly out with his arm twisted in FALDER'S. The latter gives a white, staring look at the three men.]

WALTER. Let him go this time, for God's sake!

WISTER. I couldn't take the responsibility, sir.

FALDER. *[With a queer, desperate laugh]* Good!

[Flinging a look back at RUTH, he throws up his head, and goes out through the outer office, half dragging WISTER after him.]

WALTER. *[With despair]* That finishes him. It'll go on for ever now.

[SWEEDLE can be seen staring through the outer door. There are sounds of footsteps descending the stone stairs; suddenly a dull thud, a faint "My God!" in WISTER'S voice.]

JAMES. What's that!

[SWEEDLE dashes forward. The door swings to behind him. There is dead silence.]

WALTER. *[Starting forward to the inner room]* The woman—she's fainting!

[He and COKESON support the fainting RUTH from the doorway of the clerks' room.]

COKESON. *[Distracted]* Here, my dear! There, there!

WALTER. Have you any brandy?

COKESON. I've got sherry.

WALTER. Get it, then. Quick!

[He places RUTH in a chair—which JAMES has dragged forward.]

COKESON. *[With sherry]* Here! It's good strong sherry.

[They try to force the sherry between her lips.]

[There is the sound of feet, and they stop to listen.]

[The outer door is reopened—WISTER and SWEEDLE are seen carrying some burden.]

JAMES. *[Hurrying forward]* What is it?

[They lay the burden down in the outer office, out of sight, and all but RUTH cluster round it, speaking in hushed voices.]

WISTER. He jumped—neck's broken.

WALTER. Good God!

WISTER. He must have been mad to think he could give me the slip like that. And what was it—just a few months!

WALTER. [*Bitterly*] Was that all?

JAMES. What a desperate thing! [*Then, in a voice unlike his own.*] Run for a doctor—you! [*SWEEDLE rushes from the outer office.*] An ambulance!

[*WISTER goes out. On RUTH's face an expression of fear and horror has been seen growing, as if she dared not turn towards the voices. She now rises and steals towards them.*

WALTER. [*Turning suddenly*] Look!

[*The three men shrink back out of her way. RUTH drops on her knees by the body.*

RUTH. [*In a whisper*] What is it? He's not breathing. [*She crouches over him.*] My dear! My pretty!

[*In the outer office doorway the figures of men are seen standing.*

RUTH. [*Leaping to her feet*] No, no! No, no! He's dead!

[*The figures of the men shrink back.*

COKESON. [*Stealing forward. In a hoarse voice*] There, there, poor dear woman!

[*At the sound behind her RUTH faces round at him.*

COKESON. No one'll touch him now! Never again! He's safe with gentle Jesus!

[*RUTH stands as though turned to stone in the doorway staring at COKESON, who, bending humbly before her, holds out his hand as one would to a lost dog.*

The curtain falls.

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injusted injustice, man collectively
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Reforms can be done. Hate can never be
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THE SKIN GAME

CAST OF THE ORIGINAL PRODUCTION AT
THE ST. MARTIN'S THEATRE, LONDON,
APRIL 21, 1920

PRODUCED BY BASIL DEAN

HILLCRIST	.	.	.	.	.	<i>Athole Stewart</i>
JILL	.	.	.	.	.	<i>Meggie Albanesi</i>
FELLOWS	.	.	.	.	.	<i>Marston Garsia</i>
THE JACKMANS	.	.	.	.	.	{ <i>Blanche Stanley</i>
						{ <i>Joseph A. Dodd</i>
MRS. HILLCRIST	.	.	.	.	.	<i>Helen Huye</i>
DAWKER	.	.	.	.	.	<i>George Elton</i>
HORNBLOWER	.	.	.	.	.	<i>Edmund Gwenn</i>
CHARLES	.	.	.	.	.	<i>Malcolm Keen</i>
CHLOE	.	.	.	.	.	<i>Mary Clare</i>
ROLF	.	.	.	.	.	<i>Frederick Cooper</i>
AN AUCTIONEER	.	.	.	.	.	<i>J. H. Roberts</i>
A SOLICITOR	.	.	.	.	.	<i>Gerald Wybrow</i>
TWO STRANGERS	.	.	.	.	.	{ <i>Charles Trevor</i>
						{ <i>Ivor Barnard</i>
ANNA	.	.	.	.	.	<i>Mary Byron</i>

ACT I

HILLCRIST's study. *A pleasant room, with books in calf bindings, and signs that the HILLCRISTS have travelled, such as a large photograph of the Taj Mahal, of Table Mountain, and the Pyramids of Egypt. A large bureau [stage Right], devoted to the business of a country estate. Two foxes' masks. Flowers in bowls. Deep armchairs. A large French window open [at Back], with a lovely view of a slight rise of fields and trees in August sunlight. A fine stone fireplace [stage Left]. A door [Left]. A door opposite [Right]. General colour effect—stone, and cigar-leaf brown, with spots of bright colour.*

HILLCRIST sits in a swivel chair at the bureau, busy with papers. He has gout, and his left foot is encased accordingly. He is a thin, dried-up man of about fifty-five, with a rather refined, rather kindly, and rather cranky countenance. Close to him stands his very upstanding nineteen-year-old daughter JILL, with clubbed hair round a pretty, manly face.

JILL. You know, Dodo, it's all pretty good rot in these days.

HILLCRIST. Cads are cads, Jill, even in these days.

JILL. What is a cad?

HILLCRIST. A self-assertive fellow, without a sense of other people.

JILL. Well, Old Hornblower I'll give you.

HILLCRIST. I wouldn't take him.

JILL. Well, you've got him. Now, Charlie—Chearlie—I say—the importance of not being Charlie——

HILLCRIST. Good heavens! do you know their Christian names?

JILL. My dear father, they've been here seven years.

HILLCRIST. In old days we only knew their Christian names from their tombstones.

JILL. Charlie Hornblower isn't really half a bad sport.

HILLCRIST. About a quarter of a bad sport—I've always thought out hunting.

JILL. [*Pulling his hair*] Now, his wife—Chloe——

HILLCRIST. [*Whimsical*] Gad! your mother'd have a fit if she knew you called her Chloe.

JILL. It's a ripping name.

HILLCRIST. Chloe! H'm! I had a spaniel once——

JILL. Dodo, you're narrow. Buck up, old darling, it won't do. Chloe has seen life, I'm pretty sure; *that's* attractive, anyway. No, mother's not in the room; don't turn your uneasy eyes.

HILLCRIST. Really, my dear, you are getting——

JILL. The limit. Now, Rolf——

HILLCRIST. What's Rolf? Another dog?

JILL. Rolf Hornblower's a topper; he really is a nice boy.

HILLCRIST. [*With a sharp look*] Oh! He's a nice boy?

JILL. Yes, darling. You know what a nice boy is, don't you?

HILLCRIST. Not in these days.

JILL. Well, I'll tell you. In the first place, he's not amorous——

HILLCRIST. What! Well, that's some comfort.

JILL. Just a jolly good companion.

HILLCRIST. To whom?

JILL. Well, to anyone—me.

HILLCRIST. Where?

JILL. Anywhere. You don't suppose I confine myself to the home paddocks, do you? I'm naturally rangey, Father.

HILLCRIST. [*Ironically*] You don't say so!

JILL. In the second place, he doesn't like discipline.

HILLCRIST. Jupiter! He does seem attractive.

JILL. In the third place, he bars his father.

HILLCRIST. Is that essential to nice *girls* too?

JILL. [*With a twirl of his hair*] Fish not! Fourthly, he's got ideas.

HILLCRIST. I knew it!

JILL. For instance, he thinks—as I do——

HILLCRIST. Ah! *Good* ideas.

JILL. [*Pulling gently*] Careful! He thinks old people run the show too much. He says they oughtn't to, because they're so damtouchy. Are you damtouchy, darling?

HILLCRIST. Well, I'm——! I don't know about touchy.

JILL. He says there'll be no world fit to live in till we get rid of the old. We must make them climb a tall tree, and shake them off it.

HILLCRIST. [*Dryly*] Oh! he says that!

JILL. Otherwise, with the way they stand on each other's rights, they'll spoil the garden for the young.

HILLCRIST. Does his father agree?

JILL. Oh! Rolf doesn't talk to *him*, his mouth's too large. Have you ever seen it, Dodo?

HILLCRIST. Of course.

JILL. It's considerable, isn't it? Now yours is—reticent, darling. [*Rumpling his hair.*]

HILLCRIST. It won't be in a minute. Do you realize that I've got gout?

JILL. Poor ducky! How long have we been here, Dodo?

HILLCRIST. Since Elizabeth, anyway.

JILL. [*Looking at his foot*] It has its drawbacks. D'you think Hornblower had a father? I believe he was spontaneous. But, Dodo, why all this—this *attitude* to the Hornblowers? [*She purses her lips and makes a gesture as of pushing persons away.*]

HILLCRIST. Because they're pushing.

JILL. That's only because we *are*, as mother would say, and they're *not*—yet. But why not let them be?

HILLCRIST. You can't.

JILL. *Why?*

HILLCRIST. It takes generations to learn to live and let live, Jill. People like that take an ell when you give them an inch.

JILL. But if you gave them the ell, they wouldn't want the inch. Why should it all be such a skin game?

HILLCRIST. Skin game? Where *do* you get your lingo?

JILL. Keep to the point, Dodo.

HILLCRIST. Well, Jill, all life's a struggle between people at different stages of development, in different positions, with different amounts of social influence and property. And the only thing is to have rules of the game and keep them. New people like the Hornblowers haven't learnt those rules; *their* only rule is to get all they can.

JILL. Darling, don't prose. They're not half as bad as you think.

HILLCRIST. Well, when I sold Hornblower Longmeadow and the cottages, I certainly found him all right. All the same, he's got the cloven hoof. [*Warming up.*] His influence in Deepwater is thoroughly bad; those potteries of his are demoralizing—the whole atmosphere of the place is changing. It was a thousand pities he ever came here and discovered that clay. He's brought in the modern cut-throat spirit.

JILL. Cut *our* throat spirit, you mean. What's your definition of a gentleman, Dodo?

HILLCRIST. [*Uneasily*] Can't describe—only feel it.

JILL. Oh! Try!

HILLCRIST. Well—er—I suppose you might say—a man who keeps his form and doesn't let life scupper him out of his standards.

JILL. But suppose his standards are low?

HILLCRIST. [*With some earnestness*] I assume, of course, that he's honest and tolerant, gentle to the weak, and not self-seeking.

JILL. Ah! self-seeking? But aren't we all, Dodo? *I* am.

HILLCRIST. [*With a smile*] You!

JILL. [*Scornfully*] Oh! yes—too young to know.

HILLCRIST. Nobody knows till they're under pretty heavy fire, Jill.

JILL. Except, of course, mother.

HILLCRIST. How do you mean—mother?

JILL. Mother reminds me of England according to herself—always right whatever she does.

HILLCRIST. Ye-es. Your mother is perhaps—the perfect woman——

JILL. That's what I was saying. Now, no one could call *you* perfect, Dodo. Besides, you've got gout.

HILLCRIST. Yes; and I want Fellows. Ring that bell.

JILL. [*Crossing to the bell*] Shall I tell you *my* definition of a gentleman? A man who gives the Hornblower his due. [*She rings the bell.*] And I think mother ought to call on them. Rolf says old Hornblower resents it fearfully that she's never made a sign to Chloe the three years she's been here.

HILLCRIST. I don't interfere with your mother in such matters. She may go and call on the devil himself if she likes.

JILL. I know you're ever so much better than she is.

HILLCRIST. That's respectful.

JILL. You do keep your prejudices out of your phiz. But mother literally looks down her nose. And she never forgives an "h." They'd get the "hell" from her if they took the "hinch."

HILLCRIST. Jill—your language!

JILL. Don't slime out of it, Dodo. I say, mother ought to call on the Hornblowers. [*No answer.*] Well?

HILLCRIST. My dear, I always let people have the last word. It makes them—feel funny. Ugh! My foot!

[*Enter FELLOWS, Left.*]

Fellows, send into the village and get another bottle of this stuff.

JILL. I'll go, darling.

[*She blows him a kiss, and goes out at the window.*]

HILLCRIST. And tell cook I've got to go on slops. This foot's worse.

FELLOWS. [*Sympathetic*] Indeed, sir.

HILLCRIST. My third go this year, Fellows.

FELLOWS. Very annoying, sir.

HILLCRIST. Ye—es. Ever had it?

FELLOWS. I fancy I have had a twinge, sir.

HILLCRIST. [*Brightening*] Have you? Where?

FELLOWS. In my cork wrist, sir.

HILLCRIST. Your what?

FELLOWS. The wrist I draw corks with.

HILLCRIST. [*With a cackle*] You'd have had more than a twinge if you'd lived with my father. H'm!

FELLOWS. Excuse me, sir—Vichy water corks, in my experience, are worse than any wine.

HILLCRIST. [*Ironically*] Ah! The country's not what it was, is it, Fellows?

FELLOWS. Getting very new, sir.

HILLCRIST. [*Feelingly*] You're right. Has Dawker come?

FELLOWS. Not yet, sir. The Jackmans would like to see you, sir.

HILLCRIST. What about?

FELLOWS. I don't know, sir.

HILLCRIST. Well, show them in.

FELLOWS. [*Going*] Yes, sir.

[HILLCRIST turns his swivel chair round. The JACKMANS come in. He, a big fellow about fifty, in a labourer's dress, with eyes which have more in them than his tongue can express; she, a little woman with a worn face, a bright, quick glance, and a tongue to match.

HILLCRIST. Good morning, Mrs. Jackman! Morning, Jackman! Haven't seen you for a long time. What can I do?

[*He draws in foot, and breath, with a sharp hiss.*

JACKMAN. [*In a down-hearted voice*] We've had notice to quit, sir.

HILLCRIST. [*With emphasis*] What!

JACKMAN. Got to be out this week.

MRS. J. Yes, sir, indeed.

HILLCRIST. Well, but when I sold Longmeadow and the cottages, it was on the express understanding that there was to be no disturbance of tenancies.

MRS. J. Yes, sir; but we've all got to go. Mrs. 'Arvey, and the Drews, an' us, and there isn't another cottage to be had anywhere in Deepwater.

HILLCRIST. I know; I want one for my cowman. This won't do at all. Where do you get it from?

JACKMAN. Mr. 'Ornblower, 'imself, sir. Just an hour ago. He come round and said: "I'm sorry; I want the cottages, and you've got to clear."

MRS. J. [*Bitterly*] He's no gentleman, sir; he put it so brisk. We been there thirty years, and now we don't know what to do. So I hope you'll excuse us coming round, sir.

HILLCRIST. I should think so, indeed! H'm! [*He rises and limps across to the fireplace on his stick. To himself*] The cloven hoof. By George! this is a breach of faith. I'll write to him, Jackman. Confound it! I'd certainly never have sold if I'd known he was going to do this.

MRS. J. No, sir, I'm sure, sir. They do say it's to do with the potteries. He wants the cottages for his workmen.

HILLCRIST. [*Sharply*] That's all very well, but he shouldn't have led me to suppose that he would make no change.

JACKMAN. [*Heavily*] They talk about his havin' bought the Centry to put up more chimneys there, and that's why he wants the cottages.

HILLCRIST. The Centry! Impossible!

MRS. J. Yes, sir; it's such a pretty spot—looks beautiful from here. [*She looks out through the window.*] Loveliest spot in all Deepwater, I always say. And your father owned it, and his father before 'im. It's a pity they ever sold it, sir, beggin' your pardon.

HILLCRIST. The Centry! [*He rings the bell.*]

MRS. J. [*Who has brightened up*] I'm glad you're goin' to stop it, sir. It does put us about. We don't know where to go. I said to Mr. Hornblower, I said, "I'm sure Mr. Hillcrist would never 'ave turned us out." An' 'e said: "Mr. Hillcrist be ——" beggin' your pardon, sir. "Make no mistake," 'e said, "you must go, missis." He don't even know our name; an' to come it like this over us! He's a dreadful new man, I think, with his overridin' notions. And sich a heavy-footed man,

to look at. [*With a sort of indulgent contempt.*] But he's from the North, they say. [*FELLOWS has entered, Left.*]

HILLCRIST. Ask Mrs. Hillcrist if she'll come.

FELLOWS. Very good, sir.

HILLCRIST. Is Dawker here?

FELLOWS. Not yet, sir.

HILLCRIST. I want to see him at once. [*FELLOWS retires.*]

JACKMAN. Mr. Hornblower said he was comin' on to see you, sir. So we thought we'd step along first.

HILLCRIST. Quite right, Jackman.

MRS. J. I said to Jackman: "Mr. Hillcrist'll stand up for us, I know. He's a gentleman," I said. "This man," I said, "don't care for the neighbourhood, or the people; he don't care for anything so long as he makes his money, and has his importance. You can't expect it, I suppose," I said; [*Bitterly*] "havin' got rich so sudden." 'The gentry don't do things like that.

HILLCRIST. [*Abstracted*] Quite, Mrs. Jackman, quite! [*To himself*] The Centry! No! [*MRS. HILLCRIST enters. A well-dressed woman, with a firm, clear-cut face.*] Oh! Amy! Mr. and Mrs. Jackman turned out of their cottage, and Mrs. Harvey, and the Drews. When I sold to Hornblower, I stipulated that they shouldn't be.

MRS. J. Our week's up on Saturday, ma'am, and I'm sure I don't know where we shall turn, because of course Jackman must be near his work, and I shall lose me washin' if we have to go far.

HILLCRIST. [*With decision*] You leave it to me, Mrs. Jackman. Good-morning! Morning, Jackman! Sorry I can't move with this gout.

MRS. J. [*For them both*] I'm sure we're very sorry, sir. Good-morning, sir. Good-morning, ma'am; and thank you kindly. [*They go out.*]

HILLCRIST. Turning people out that have been there thirty years. I won't have it. It's a breach of faith.

MRS. H. Do you suppose this Hornblower will care two straws about that, Jack?

HILLCRIST. He must, when it's put to him, if he's got any decent feeling.

MRS. H. He hasn't.

HILLCRIST. [*Suddenly*] The Jackmans talk of his having bought the Centry to put up more chimneys.

MRS. H. Never! [*At the window, looking out.*] Impossible! It would ruin the place utterly, besides cutting us off from the Duke's. Oh, no! Miss Mullins would never sell behind our backs.

HILLCRIST. Anyway I must stop his turning these people out.

MRS. H. [*With a little smile, almost contemptuous*] You might have known he'd do something of the sort. You will imagine people are like yourself, Jack. You always ought to make Dawker have things in black and white.

HILLCRIST. I said quite distinctly: "Of course you won't want to disturb the tenancies; there's a great shortage of cottages." Hornblower told me as distinctly that he wouldn't. What more do you want?

MRS. H. A man like that thinks of nothing but the short cut to his own way. [*Looking out of the window towards the rise.*] If he buys the Centry and puts up chimneys, we simply couldn't stop here.

HILLCRIST. My father would turn in his grave.

MRS. H. It would have been more useful if he'd not dipped the estate, and sold the Centry. This Hornblower hates us; he thinks we turn up our noses at him.

HILLCRIST. As we do, Amy.

MRS. H. Who wouldn't? A man without traditions, who believes in nothing but money and push.

HILLCRIST. Suppose he won't budge, can we do anything for the Jackmans?

MRS. H. There are the two rooms Beaver used to have, over the stables. [FELLOWS enters.]

FELLOWS. Mr. Dawker, sir.

[DAWKER is a short, square, rather red-faced terrier of a man, in riding clothes and gaiters.]

HILLCRIST. Ah! Dawker, I've got gout again.

DAWKER. Very sorry, sir. How de do, ma'am?

HILLCRIST. Did you meet the Jackmans?

DAWKER. Yeh. [*He hardly ever quite finishes a word, seeming to snap off their tails.*]

HILLCRIST. Then you heard?

DAWKER. [*Nodding*] Smart man, Hornblower; never lets grass grow.

HILLCRIST. Smart?

DAWKER. [*Grinning*] Don't do to underrate your neighbours.

MRS. H. A cad—I call him.

DAWKER. That's it, ma'am—got all the advantage.

HILLCRIST. Heard anything about the Centry, Dawker?

DAWKER. Hornblower wants to buy.

HILLCRIST. Miss Mullins would never sell, would she?

DAWKER. She wants to.

HILLCRIST. The deuce she does!

DAWKER. He won't stick at the price either.

MRS. H. What's it worth, Dawker?

DAWKER. Depends on what you want it for.

MRS. H. He wants it for spite; we want it for sentiment.

DAWKER. [*Grinning*] Worth what you like to give, then; but he's a rich man.

MRS. H. Intolerable!

DAWKER. [*To HILLCRIST*] Give me your figure, sir. I'll try the old lady before he gets at her.

HILLCRIST. [*Pondering*] I don't want to buy, unless there's nothing else for it. I should have to raise the money on the estate; it won't stand much more. I can't believe the fellow would be such a barbarian. Chimneys within three hundred yards, right in front of this house! It's a nightmare.

MRS. H. You'd much better let Dawker make sure, Jack.

HILLCRIST. [*Uncomfortable*] Jackman says Hornblower's coming round to see me. I shall put it to him.

DAWKER. Make him keener than ever. Better get in first.

HILLCRIST. Ape his methods!—Ugh! Confound this gout!

[*He gets back to his chair with difficulty.*] Look here, Dawker, I wanted to see you about gates——

FELLOWS. [*Entering*] Mr. Hornblower.

[Hornblower enters—a man of medium height, thoroughly broadened, blown out, as it were, by success. He has thick, coarse dark hair, just grizzled, very bushy eyebrows, a wide mouth. He wears quite ordinary clothes, as if that department were in charge of someone who knew about such things. He has a small rose in his buttonhole, and carries a Homburg hat, which one suspects will look too small on his head.]

HORNBLOWER. Good-morning! good-morning! How are ye, Dawker? Fine morning! Lovely weather! [*His voice has a curious blend in its tone of brass and oil, and an accent not quite Scotch nor quite North country.*] Haven't seen ye for a long time, Hillcrist.

HILLCRIST. [*Who has risen*] Not since I sold you Longmeadow and those cottages, I believe.

HORNBLOWER. Dear me, now! that's what I came about.

HILLCRIST. [*Subsiding again into his chair*] Forgive me! Won't you sit down?

HORNBLOWER. [*Not sitting*] Have ye got gout? That's unfortunate. I never get it. I've no disposition that way. Had no ancestors, you see. Just me own drinkin' to answer for.

HILLCRIST. You're lucky.

HORNBLOWER. I wonder if Mrs. Hillcrist thinks that! Am I lucky to have no past, ma'am? Just the future?

MRS. H. You're sure you have the future, Mr. Hornblower?

HORNBLOWER. [*With a laugh*] That's your aristocratic rapier-thrust. You aristocrats are very hard people underneath your manners. Ye love to lay a body out. But I've got the future all right.

HILLCRIST. [*Meaningly*] I've had the Jackmans here, Mr. Hornblower.

HORNBLOWER. Who are they—man with the little spitfire wife?

HILLCRIST. They're very excellent, good people, and they've been in that cottage quietly thirty years.

HORNBLOWER. [*Throwing out his forefinger—a favourite gesture*] Ah! ye've wanted me to stir ye up a bit. Deepwater needs a bit o' go put into it. There's generally some go where I am. I daresay you wish there'd been no "come." [*He laughs.*]

MRS. H. We certainly like people to keep their word, Mr. Hornblower.

HILLCRIST. Amy!

HORNBLOWER. Never mind, Hillcrist; takes more than that to upset me.

[MRS. HILLCRIST exchanges a look with DAWKER, who slips out unobserved.]

HILLCRIST. You promised me, you know, not to change the tenancies.

HORNBLOWER. Well, I've come to tell ye that I have. I wasn't expecting to have the need when I bought. Thought the Duke would sell me a bit down there; but devil a bit he will; and now I must have those cottages for my workmen. I've got important works, ye know.

HILLCRIST. [*Getting heated*] The Jackmans have their importance too, sir. Their heart's in that cottage.

HORNBLOWER. Have a sense of proportion, man. My works supply thousands of people, and *my* heart's in *them*. What's more, they make my fortune. I've got ambitions—I'm a serious man. Suppose I were to consider this and that, and every little potty objection—where should I get to?—nowhere!

HILLCRIST. All the same, this sort of thing isn't done, you know.

HORNBLOWER. Not by you because ye've got no need to do it. Here ye are, quite content on what your fathers made for ye. Ye've no ambitions; and ye want other people to have none. How d'ye think your fathers got your land?

HILLCRIST. [*Who has risen*] Not by breaking their word.

HORNBLOWER. [*Throwing out his finger*] Don't ye believe it.

They got it by breaking their word and turnin' out Jackmans, if that's their name, all over the place.

MRS. H. That's an insult, Mr. Hornblower.

HORNBLOWER. No; it's a repartee. If ye think so much of these Jackmans, build them a cottage yourselves; ye've got the space.

HILLCRIST. That's beside the point. You promised me, and I sold on that understanding.

HORNBLOWER. And I bought on the understandin' that I'd get some more land from the Duke.

HILLCRIST. That's nothing to do with me.

HORNBLOWER. Ye'll find it has; because I'm going to have those cottages.

HILLCRIST. Well, I call it simply—— [*He checks himself.*]

HORNBLOWER. Look here, Hillcrist, ye've not had occasion to understand men like me. I've got the guts, and I've got the money, and I don't sit still on it. I'm going ahead because I believe in meself. I've no use for sentiment and that sort of thing. Forty of your Jackmans aren't worth me little finger.

HILLCRIST. [*Angry*] Of all the blatant things I ever heard said!——

HORNBLOWER. Well, as we're speaking plainly, I've been thinkin'. Ye want the village run your old-fashioned way, and I want it run mine. I fancy there's not room for the two of us here.

MRS. H. When are you going?

HORNBLOWER. Never fear, *I'm* not going.

HILLCRIST. Look here, Mr. Hornblower—this infernal gout makes me irritable—puts me at a disadvantage. But I should be glad if you'd kindly explain yourself.

HORNBLOWER. [*With a great smile*] Ca' canny; I'm fra' the North.

HILLCRIST. I'm told you wish to buy the Centry and put more of your chimneys up there, regardless of the fact [*He points through the window*] that it would utterly ruin the house we've had for generations, and all our pleasure here.

HORNBLOWER. How the man talks! Why! Ye'd think he owned the sky, because his fathers built him a house with a pretty view, where he's nothing to do but live. It's sheer want of something to do that gives ye your fine sentiments, Hillcris.

HILLCRIST. Have the goodness not to charge me with idleness. Dawker—where is he?—[*He shows the bureau.*] When you do the drudgery of your works as thoroughly as I do that of my estate—— Is it true about the Centry?

HORNBLOWER. Gospel true. If ye want to know, my son Chearlie is buyin' it this very minute.

MRS. H. [*Turning with a start*] What do you say?

HORNBLOWER. Ay, he's with the old lady; she wants to sell, an' she'll get her price, whatever it is.

HILLCRIST. [*With deep anger*] If that isn't a skin game, Mr. Hornblower, I don't know what is.

HORNBLOWER. Ah! Ye've got a very nice expression there. "Skin game!" Well, bad words break no bones, an' they're wonderful for hardenin' the heart. If it wasn't for a lady's presence, I could give ye a specimen or two.

MRS. H. Oh! Mr. Hornblower, that need not stop you, I'm sure.

HORNBLOWER. Well, and I don't know that it need. Ye're an obstruction—the like of you—ye're in my path. And anyone in my path doesn't stay there long; or, if he does, he stays there on my terms. And my terms are chimneys in the Centry where I need 'em. It'll do ye a power of good, too, to know that ye're not almighty.

HILLCRIST. And that's being neighbourly!

HORNBLOWER. And how have ye tried bein' neighbourly to me? If I haven't a wife, I've got a daughter-in-law. Have ye called on her, ma'am? I'm new, and ye're an old family. Ye don't like me, ye think I'm a pushin' man. I go to chapel, an' ye don't like that. I make things and I sell them, and ye don't like that. I buy land, and ye don't like that. It threatens the view from your windies. Well, I don't like you, and I'm not goin' to put up with your attitude. Ye've had things your own

way too long, and now ye're not going to have them any longer.

HILLCRIST. Will you hold to your word over those cottages?

HORNBLOWER. I'm goin' to have the cottages. I need them, and more besides, now I'm to put up me new works.

HILLCRIST. That's a declaration of war.

HORNBLOWER. Ye never said a truer word. It's one or the other of us, and I rather think it's goin' to be me. I'm the risin' and you're the settin' sun, as the poet says.

HILLCRIST. [*Touching the bell*] We shall see if you can ride rough-shod like this. We used to have decent ways of going about things here. You want to change all that. Well, we shall do our damndest to stop you. [*To FELLOWS at the door*] Are the Jackmans still in the house? Ask them to be good enough to come in.

HORNBLOWER. [*With the first sign of uneasiness*] I've seen these people. I've nothing more to say to them. I told 'em I'd give 'em five pounds to cover their moving.

HILLCRIST. It doesn't occur to you that people, however humble, like to have some say in their own fate?

HORNBLOWER. I never had any say in mine till I had the brass, and nobody ever will. It's all hypocrisy. You country folk are fair awful hypocrites. Ye talk about good form and all that sort o' thing. It's just the comfortable doctrine of the man in the saddle; sentimental varnish. Ye're every bit as hard as I am, underneath.

MRS. H. [*Who has been standing very still all this time*] You flatter us.

HORNBLOWER. Not at all. God helps those who 'elp themselves—that's at the bottom of all religion. I'm goin' to help meself, and God's going to help me.

MRS. H. I admire your knowledge.

HILLCRIST. We are in the right, and God helps——

HORNBLOWER. Don't ye believe it; ye 'aven't got the energy.

MRS. H. Nor perhaps the conceit.

HORNBLOWER. [*Throwing out his forefinger*] No, no; 'tish't conceit to believe in yourself when ye've got reason to.

[*The JACKMANS have entered.*]

HILLCRIST. I'm very sorry, Mrs. Jackman, but I just wanted you to realize that I've done my best with this gentleman.

MRS. J. [*Doubtfully*] Yes, sir. I thought if you spoke for us, he'd feel different-like.

HORNBLOWER. One cottage is the same as another, missis. I made ye a fair offer of five pounds for the moving.

JACKMAN. [*Slowly*] We wouldn't take fifty to go out of that 'ouse. We brought up three children there, an' buried two from it.

MRS. J. [*To MRS. HILLCRIST*] We're attached to it like, ma'am.

HILLCRIST. [*To HORNBLOWER*] How would you like being turned out of a place you were fond of?

HORNBLOWER. Not a bit. But little considerations have to give way to big ones. Now, missis, I'll make it ten pounds, and I'll send a wagon to shift your things. If that isn't fair——! Ye'd better accept, I shan't keep it open.

[*The JACKMANS look at each other; their faces show deep anger—and the question they ask each other is which will speak.*]

MRS. J. We won't take it; eh, George?

JACKMAN. Not a farden. We come there when we was married.

HORNBLOWER. [*Throwing out his finger*] Ye're very improvident folk.

HILLCRIST. Don't lecture them, Mr. Hornblower; they come out of this miles above you.

HORNBLOWER. [*Angry*] Well, I *was* going to give ye another week, but ye'll go out next Saturday; and take care ye're not late, or your things'll be put out—in the rain.

MRS. H. [*To MRS. JACKMAN*] We'll send down for your things, and you can come to us for the time being.

[*MRS. JACKMAN drops a curtsey; her eyes stab HORNBLOWER.*]

JACKMAN. [*Heavily, clenching his fists*] You're no gentleman! Don't put temptation in my way, that's all.

HILLCRIST. [*In a low voice*] Jackman!

HORNBLOWER. [*Triumphantly*] Ye hear that! That's your protégé! Keep out o' my way, me man, or I'll put the police on to ye for utterin' threats.

HILLCRIST. You'd better go now, Jackman.

[*The JACKMANS move to the door.*

MRS. J. [*Turning*] Maybe you'll repent it some day, sir.

[*They go out, MRS. HILLCRIST following.*

HORNBLOWER. We—ell, I'm sorry they're such unreasonable folk. I never met people with less notion of which side their bread was buttered.

HILLCRIST. And I never met anyone so pachydermatous.

HORNBLOWER. What's that, in Heaven's name? Ye needn' wrap it up in long words now your good lady's gone.

HILLCRIST. [*With dignity*] I'm not going in for a slanging match. I resent your conduct much too deeply.

HORNBLOWER. Look here, Hillcrist, I don't object to you personally; ye seem to me a poor creature that's bound to get left with your gout and your dignity; but of course ye can make yourself very disagreeable before ye're done. Now I want to be the movin' spirit here. I'm full of plans. I'm goin' to stand for Parliament; I'm goin' to make this a prosperous place. I'm a good-natured man if you'll treat me as such. Now, you take me on as a neighbour and all that, and I'll manage without chimneys on the Centry. Is it a bargain? [*He holds out his hand.*

HILLCRIST. [*Ignoring it*] I thought you said you didn't keep your word when it suited you to break it?

HORNBLOWER. Now, don't get on the high horse. You and me could be very good friends; but I can be a very nasty enemy. The chimneys will not look nice from that windie, ye know.

HILLCRIST. [*Deeply angry*] Mr. Hornblower, if you think I'll take your hand after this Jackman business, you're greatly mistaken. You are proposing that I shall stand in with you while you tyrannize over the neighbourhood. Please realize that unless you leave those tenancies undisturbed as you said you would, we don't know each other.

HORNBLOWER. Well, that won't trouble me much. Now, ye'd better think it over; ye've got gout and that makes ye hasty. I tell ye again: I'm not the man to make an enemy of. Unless ye're friendly, sure as I stand here I'll ruin the look of your place. [*The toot of a car is heard.*] There's my car. I sent Chearlie and his wife in it to buy the Centry. And make no mistake—he's got it in his pocket. It's your last chance, Hillcrist, I'm not averse to you as a man; I think ye're the best of the fossils round here; at least, I think ye can do me the most harm socially. Come now! [*He holds out his hand again.*]

HILLCRIST. Not if you'd bought the Centry ten times over. Your ways are not mine, and I'll have nothing to do with you.

HORNBLOWER. [*Very angry*] Really! Is that so? Very well. Now ye're goin' to learn something, an' it's time ye did. D'ye realize that I'm very nearly round ye? [*He draws a circle slowly in the air.*] I'm at Uphill, the works are here, here's Longmeadow, here's the Centry that I've just bought, there's only the Common left to give ye touch with the world. Now between you and the Common there's the high road. I come out on the high road here to your north, and I shall come out on it there to your west. When I've got me new works up on the Centry, I shall be makin' a trolley track between the works up to the road at both ends, so my goods will be running right round ye. How'll ye like that for a country place?

[*For answer HILLCRIST, who is angry beyond the power of speech, walks, forgetting to use his stick, up to the French window. While he stands there, with his back to HORNBLOWER, the door L. is flung open, and JILL enters, preceding CHARLES, his wife CHLOE, and ROLF. CHARLES is a goodish-looking, moustached young man of about twenty-eight, with a white rim to the collar of his waistcoat, and spats. He has his hand behind CHLOE's back, as if to prevent her turning tail. She is rather a handsome young woman, with dark eyes, full red lips, and a suspicion of powder, a little under-dressed for the country. ROLF, who brings up the rear, is about twenty, with an open face and stiffish butter-coloured hair. JILL runs over to her father at the window. She has a bottle.*]

JILL. [*Sotto voce*] Look, Dodo, I've brought the lot! Isn't it a treat, dear Papa? And here's the stuff. Hallo!

[*The exclamation is induced by the apprehension that there has been a row. HILLCRIST gives a stiff little bow, remaining where he is in the window. JILL stays close to him, staring from one to the other, then blocks him off and engages him in conversation. CHARLES has gone up to his father, who has remained maliciously still, where he delivered his last speech. CHLOE and ROLF stand awkwardly waiting between the fireplace and the door.*]

HORNBLOWER. Well, Chearlie?

CHARLES. Not got it.

HORNBLOWER. Not!

CHARLES. I'd practically got her to say she'd sell at three thousand five hundred, when that fellow Dawker turned up.

HORNBLOWER. That bull-terrier of a chap! Why, he was here a while ago. Oh—ho! So that's it!

CHARLES. I heard him gallop up. He came straight for the old lady, and got her away. What he said I don't know; but she came back looking wiser than an owl; said she'd think it over, thought she had other views.

HORNBLOWER. Did ye tell her she might have her price?

CHARLES. Practically I did.

HORNBLOWER. Well?

CHARLES. She thought it would be fairer to put it up to auction. There were other inquiries. Oh! She's a leery old bird—reminds me of one of those pictures of Fate, don't you know.

HORNBLOWER. Auction! Well, if it's not gone we'll get it yet. That damned little Dawker! I've had a row with Hillcrist.

CHARLES. I thought so. [*They are turning cautiously to look at HILLCRIST, when JILL steps forward.*]

JILL. [*Flushed and determined*] That's not a bit sporting of you, Mr. Hornblower. [*At her words ROLF comes forward too.*]

HORNBLOWER. Ye should hear both sides before ye say that, missy.

JILL. There isn't another side to turning out the Jackmans after you'd promised.

HORNBLOWER. Oh! dear me, yes. They don't matter a row of gingerbread to the schemes I've got for betterin' this neighbourhood.

JILL. I *had* been standing up for you; now I won't.

HORNBLOWER. Dear, dear! What'll become of me?

JILL. I won't say anything about the other thing because I think it's beneath dignity to notice it. But to turn poor people out of their cottages is a shame.

HORNBLOWER. Hoity me!

ROLF. [*Suddenly*] You haven't been doing that, father?

CHARLES. Shut up, Rolf!

HORNBLOWER. [*Turning on ROLF*] Ha! Here's a league o' youth! My young whipper-snapper, keep your mouth shut and leave it to your elders to know what's right.

[*Under the weight of this rejoinder ROLF stands biting his lips. Then he throws his head up.*]

ROLF. I hate it!

HORNBLOWER. [*With real venom*] Oh! Ye hate it? Ye can get out of my house, then.

JILL. Free speech, Mr. Hornblower; don't be violent.

HORNBLOWER. Ye're right, young lady. Ye can stay in my house, Rolf, and learn manners. Come, Chearlie!

JILL. [*Quite softly*] Mr. Hornblower!

HILLCRIST. [*From the window*] Jill!

JILL. [*Impatiently*] Well, what's the good of it? Life's too short for rows, and too jolly!

ROLF. Bravo!

HORNBLOWER. [*Who has shown a sign of weakening*] Now, look here! I will not have revolt in my family. Ye'll just have to learn that a man who's worked as I have, who's risen as I have, and who knows the world, is the proper judge of what's right and wrong. I'll answer to God for me actions, and not to you young people.

JILL. Poor God!

HORNBLOWER. [*Genuinely shocked*] Ye blasphemous young thing! [*To ROLF*] And ye're just as bad, ye young freethinker. I won't have it.

HILLCRIST. [*Who has come down, Right*] Jill, I wish you would kindly not talk.

JILL. I can't help it.

CHARLES. [*Putting his arm through HORNBLOWER'S*] Come along, father! Deeds, not words.

HORNBLOWER. Ay! Deeds!

[*MRS. HILLCRIST and DAWKER have entered by the French window.*]

MRS. H. Quite right! [*They all turn and look at her.*]

HORNBLOWER. Ah! So ye put your dog on to it. [*He throws out his finger at DAWKER.*] Very smart, that—I give ye credit.

MRS. H. [*Pointing to CHLOE, who has stood by herself, forgotten and uncomfortable throughout the scene*] May I ask who this lady is?

[*CHLOE turns round startled, and her vanity bag slips down her dress to the floor.*]

HORNBLOWER. No, ma'am, ye may not, for ye know perfectly well.

JILL. I brought her in, mother. [*She moves to CHLOE'S side.*]

MRS. H. Will you take her out again, then.

HILLCRIST. Amy, have the goodness to remember——

MRS. H. That this is my house so far as ladies are concerned.

JILL. Mother! [*She looks astonished at CHLOE, who, about to speak, does not, passing her eyes, with a queer, half-scared expression, from MRS. HILLCRIST to DAWKER.*] [*To CHLOE*] I'm awfully sorry. Come on!

[*They go out, Left. ROLF hurries after them.*]

CHARLES. You've insulted my wife. Why? What do you mean by it? [*MRS. HILLCRIST simply smiles.*]

HILLCRIST. I apologize. I regret extremely. There is no reason why the ladies of your family or of mine should be involved in our quarrel. For Heaven's sake, let's fight like gentlemen.

HORNBLOWER. Catchwords—sneers! No; we'll play what

ye call a skin game, Hillcrist, without gloves on; we won't spare each other. Ye look out for yourselves, for, begod, after this morning I mean business. And as for you, Dawker, ye sly dog, ye think yourself very clever; but I'll have the Centry yet. Come, Chearlie.

[*They go out, passing JILL, who is coming in again, in the doorway.*]

HILLCRIST. Well, Dawker?

DAWKER. [*Grinning*] Safe for the moment. The old lady'll put it up to auction. Couldn't get her to budge from that. Says she don't want to be unneighbourly to either. But, if you ask me, it's money she smells!

JILL. [*Advancing*] Now, mother!

MRS. H. Well?

JILL. Why did you insult her?

MRS. H. I think I only asked you to take her out.

JILL. Why? Even if she is Old Combustion's daughter-in-law?

MRS. H. My dear Jill, allow me to judge the sort of acquaintances I wish to make. [*She looks at DAWKER.*]

JILL. She's all right. Lots of women powder and touch up their lips nowadays. I think she's rather a good sort; she was awfully upset.

MRS. H. Too upset.

JILL. Oh! don't be so mysterious, mother. If you know something, do spit it out!

MRS. H. Do you wish me to—er—"spit it out," Jack?

HILLCRIST. Dawker, if you don't mind——

[*DAWKER, with a nod, passes away out of the French window.*]
Jill, be respectful, and don't talk like a bargee.

JILL. It's no good, Dodo. It made me ashamed. It's just as—as caddish to insult people who haven't said a word, in your own house, as it is to be—old Hornblower.

MRS. H. You don't know what you're talking about.

HILLCRIST. What's the matter with young Mrs. Hornblower?

MRS. H. Excuse me, I shall keep my thoughts to myself at present.

[*She looks coldly at JILL, and goes out through the French window.*

HILLCRIST. You've thoroughly upset your mother, Jill.

JILL. It's something Dawker's told her; I saw them. I don't like Dawker, father, he's so common.

HILLCRIST. My dear, we can't all be uncommon. He's got lots of go. You must apologize to your mother.

JILL. [*Shaking her clubbed hair*] They'll make you do things you don't approve of, Dodo, if you don't look out. Mother's fearfully bitter when she gets her knife in. If old Hornblower's disgusting, it's no reason we should be.

HILLCRIST. So you think I'm capable—that's nice, Jill!

JILL. No, no, darling! I only want to warn you solemnly that mother'll tell you you're fighting fair, no matter what she and Dawker do.

HILLCRIST. [*Smiling*] Jill, I don't think I ever saw you so serious.

JILL. No. Because—[*She swallows a lump in her throat.*] Well—I was just beginning to enjoy myself; and now—everything's going to be bitter and beastly, with mother in that mood. That horrible old man! Oh, Dodo! Don't let them make *you* horrid! You're such a darling. How's your gout, ducky?

HILLCRIST. Better; lot better.

JILL. There, you see! That shows! It's going to be half interesting for you, but not for—us.

HILLCRIST. Look here, Jill—is there anything between you and young what's-his-name—Rolf?

JILL. [*Biting her lip*] No. But—now it's *all* spoiled.

HILLCRIST. You can't expect me to regret that.

JILL. I don't mean any tosh about love's young dream; but I do like being friends. I want to *enjoy* things, Dodo, and you can't do that when everybody's on the hate. You're going to wallow in it, and so shall I—oh! I know I shall!—we shall all wallow, and think of nothing but “one for his nob.”

HILLCRIST. Aren't you fond of your home?

JILL. Of course. I love it.

HILLCRIST. Well, you won't be able to live in it unless we

stop that ruffian. Chimneys and smoke, the trees cut down, piles of pots. Every kind of abomination. There! [*He points.*] Imagine! [*He points through the French window, as if he could see those chimneys rising and marring the beauty of the fields.*] I was born here, and my father, and his, and his, and his. They loved those fields, and those old trees. And this barbarian, with his "improvement" schemes, forsooth! I learned to ride in the Centry meadows—prettiest spring meadows in the world; I've climbed every tree there. Why my father ever sold——! But who could have imagined this? And come at a bad moment, when money's scarce.

JILL. [*Cuddling his arm*] Dodo!

HILLCRIST. Yes. But you don't love the place as I do, Jill. You youngsters don't love anything, I sometimes think.

JILL. I do, Dodo, I do!

HILLCRIST. You've got it all before you. But you may live your life and never find anything so good and so beautiful as this old home. I'm not going to have it spoiled without a fight.

[*Conscious of having betrayed sentiment, he walks out at the French window, passing away to the Right.* JILL, following to the window, looks. Then throwing back her head, she clasps her hands behind it.

JILL. Oh—oh—oh! [*A voice behind her says, "Jill!" She turns and starts back, leaning against the right lintel of the window. ROLF appears outside the window from Left.*] Who goes there?

ROLF. [*Buttressed against the Left lintel*] Enemy—after Chloe's bag.

JILL. Pass, enemy! And all's ill!

[*ROLF passes through the window, and retrieves the vanity bag from the floor where CHLOE dropped it, then again takes his stand against the Left lintel of the French window.*

ROLF. It's not going to make any difference, is it?

JILL. You know it is.

ROLF. Sins of the fathers.

JILL. Unto the third and fourth generation. What sin has *my* father committed?

ROLF. None, in a way; only, I've often told you I don't see why you should treat us as outsiders. We don't like it.

JILL. Well, you shouldn't be, then; I mean, *he* shouldn't be.

ROLF. Father's just as human as your father; he's wrapped up in us, and all his "getting on" is for us. Would you like to be treated as your mother treated Chloe? Your mother's set the stroke for the other big-wigs about here; nobody calls on Chloe. And why not? Why not? I think it's contemptible to bar people just because they're *new*, as you call it, and have to make their position instead of having it left them.

JILL. It's *not* because they're new, it's because—if your father behaved like a gentleman, he'd be treated like one.

ROLF. Would he? I don't believe it. My father's a very able man; he thinks he's entitled to have influence here. Well, everybody tries to keep him down. Oh! yes, they do. That makes him mad and more determined than ever to get his way. You ought to be just, Jill.

JILL. I *am* just.

ROLF. No, you're not. Besides, what's it got to do with Charlie and Chloe? Chloe's particularly harmless. It's pretty sickening for her. Father didn't expect people to call until Charlie married, but since——

JILL. I think it's all very petty.

ROLF. It *is*—a dog-in-the-manger business; I did think *you* were above it.

JILL. How would you like to have your home spoiled?

ROLF. I'm not going to argue. Only things don't stand still. Homes aren't any more proof against change than anything else.

JILL. All right! You come and try and take ours.

ROLF. We don't want to take your home.

JILL. Like the Jackmans'?

ROLF. All right. I see you're hopelessly prejudiced.

[*He turns to go.*]

JILL. [*Just as he is vanishing—softly*] Enemy?

ROLF. [*Turning*] Yes, enemy.

JILL. Before the battle—let's shake hands.

[*They move from the lintels and grasp each other's hands in the centre of the French window.*]

The curtain falls.

ACT II

SCENE I

A billiard room in a provincial hotel, where things are bought and sold. The scene is set well forward, and is not very broad; it represents the auctioneer's end of the room, having, rather to stage Left, a narrow table with two chairs facing the audience, where the auctioneer will sit and stand. The table, which is set forward to the footlights, is littered with green-covered particulars of sale. The audience are in effect public and bidders. There is a door on the Left, level with the table. Along the back wall, behind the table, are two raised benches with two steps up to them, such as billiard rooms often have, divided by a door in the middle of a wall, which is panelled in oak. Late September sunlight is coming from a skylight (not visible) on to these seats. The stage is empty when the curtain goes up, but DAWKER and MRS. HILLCRIST are just entering through the door at the back.

DAWKER. Be out of their way here, ma'am. See old Hornblower with Chearlie? [*He points down to the audience.*]

MRS. H. It begins at three, doesn't it?

DAWKER. They won't be over punctual; there's only the Centry selling. There's young Mrs. Hornblower with the other boy—[*Pointing*] over at the entrance. I've got that chap I told you of down from town.

MRS. H. Ah! make quite sure of her, Dawker. Any mistake would be fatal.

DAWKER. [*Nodding*] That's right, ma'am. Lot of people—always spare time to watch an auction—ever remark that? The Duke's agent's here; shouldn't be surprised if he chipped in.

MRS. H. Where did you leave my husband?

DAWKER. With Miss Jill, in the courtyard. He's coming to

you. In case I miss him, tell him when I reach his limit to blow his nose if he wants me to go on; when he blows it a second time, I'll stop for good. Hope we shan't get to that. Old Horn-blower doesn't throw his money away.

MRS. H. What limit did you settle?

DAWKER. Six thousand!

MRS. H. That's a fearful price. Well, good luck to you, Dawker!

DAWKER. Good luck, ma'am. I'll go and see to that little matter of Mrs. Chloe. Never fear, we'll do them in somehow.

[*He winks, lays his finger on the side of his nose, and goes out at the door.*]

[MRS. HILLCRIST mounts the two steps, sits down Right of the door, and puts up a pair of long-handled glasses. Through the door behind her come CHLOE and ROLF. She makes a sign for him to go, and shuts the door.]

CHLOE. [*At the foot of the steps—in the gangway—in a slightly common accent*] Mrs. Hillcrist!

MRS. H. [*Not quite starting*] I beg your pardon?

CHLOE. [*Again*] Mrs. Hillcrist——

MRS. H. Well?

CHLOE. I never did you any harm.

MRS. H. Did I ever say you did?

CHLOE. No; but you act as if I had.

MRS. H. I'm not aware that I've acted at all—as yet. You are nothing to me, except as one of your family.

CHLOE. 'Tisn't I that wants to spoil your home.

MRS. H. Stop them then. I see your husband down there with his father.

CHLOE. I—I have tried.

MRS. H. [*Looking at her*] Oh! I suppose such men don't pay attention to what women ask them.

CHLOE. [*With a flash of spirit*] I'm fond of my husband. I——

MRS. H. [*Looking at her steadily*] I don't quite know why you spoke to me.

CHLOE. [*With a sort of pathetic sullenness*] I only thought perhaps you'd like to treat me as a human being.

MRS. H. Really, if you don't mind, I should like to be left alone just now.

CHLOE. [*Unhappily acquiescent*] Certainly! I'll go to the other end. [*She moves to the Left, mounts the steps and sits down.*]

[ROLF, looking in through the door, and seeing where she is, joins her. MRS. HILLCRIST re-settles herself a little further in on the Right.]

ROLF. [*Bending over to CHLOE, after a glance at MRS. HILLCRIST*] Are you all right?

CHLOE. It's awfully hot.

[*She fans herself with the particulars of sale.*]

ROLF. There's Dawker. I hate that chap!

CHLOE. Where?

ROLF. Down there; see?

[*He points down to stage Right of the room.*]

CHLOE. [*Drawing back in her seat with a little gasp*] Oh!

ROLF. [*Not noticing*] Who's that next him, looking up here?

CHLOE. I don't know.

[*She has raised her auction programme suddenly, and sits fanning herself, carefully screening her face.*]

ROLF. [*Looking at her*] Don't you feel well? Shall I get you some water? [*He gets up at her nod.*]

[*As he reaches the door, HILLCRIST and JILL come in. HILLCRIST passes him abstractedly with a nod, and sits down beside his wife.*]

JILL. [*To ROLF*] Come to see us turned out?

ROLF. [*Emphatically*] No. I'm looking after Chloe; she's not well.

JILL. [*Glancing at her*] Sorry. She needn't have come, I suppose? [*ROLF deigns no answer, and goes out.*]

[*JILL glances at CHLOE, then at her parents talking in low voices, and sits down next her father, who makes room for her.*]

MRS. H. Can Dawker see you there, Jack? [*HILLCRIST nods.*] What's the time?

HILLCRIST. Three minutes to three.

JILL. Don't you feel beastly all down the backs of your legs, Dodo?

HILLCRIST. Yes.

JILL. Do you, mother?

MRS. H. No.

JILL. A wagon of old Hornblower's pots passed while we were in the yard. It's an omen.

MRS. H. Don't be foolish, Jill.

JILL. Look at the old brute! Dodo, hold my hand.

MRS. H. Make sure you've got a handkerchief, Jack.

HILLCRIST. I can't go beyond the six thousand; I shall have to raise every penny on mortgage as it is. The estate simply won't stand more, Amy.

[He feels in his breast pocket, and pulls up the edge of his handkerchief.]

JILL. Oh! Look! There's Miss Mullins, at the back; just come in. Isn't she a spidery old chip?

MRS. H. Come to gloat. Really, I think her not accepting your offer is disgusting. Her impartiality is all humbug.

HILLCRIST. Can't blame her for getting what she can—it's human nature. Phew! I used to feel like this before a *vivâ voce*. Who's that next to Dawker?

JILL. What a fish!

MRS. H. *[To herself]* Ah! yes. *[Her eyes slide round at CHLOE, sitting motionless and rather sunk in her seat, slowly fanning herself with the particulars of the sale.]* Jack, go and offer her my smelling salts.

HILLCRIST. *[Taking the salts]* Thank God for a human touch!

MRS. H. *[Taken aback]* Oh! I——

JILL. *[With a quick look at her mother, snatching the salts]* I will. *[She goes over to CHLOE with the salts.]* Have a sniff; you look awfully white.

CHLOE. *[Looking up, startled]* Oh! no, thanks. I'm all right.

JILL. No, do! You must.

[CHLOE takes them.]

JILL. D'you mind letting me see that a minute? [*She takes the particulars of the sale and studies it, but CHLOE has buried the lower part of her face in her hand and the smelling-salts bottle.*] Beastly hot, isn't it? You'd better keep that.

CHLOE. [*Her dark eyes wandering and uneasy*] Rolf's getting me some water.

JILL. Why do you stay? You didn't want to come, did you? [*CHLOE shakes her head.*] All right! Here's your water. [*She hands back the particulars and slides over to her seat, passing ROLF in the gangway, with her chin well up.*]

[*MRS. HILLCRIST, who has watched CHLOE and JILL and DAWKER and his friend, makes an inquiring movement with her hand, but gets a disappointing answer.*]

JILL. What's the time, Dodo?

HILLCRIST. [*Looking at his watch*] Three minutes past.

JILL. [*Sighing*] Oh, hell!

HILLCRIST. Jill!

JILL. Sorry, Dodo. I was only thinking. Look! Here he is! Phew!—isn't he——?

MRS. H. 'Sh!

[*The AUCTIONEER comes in Left and goes to the table. He is a square, short, brown-faced, common-looking man, with clipped grey hair fitting him like a cap, and a clipped grey moustache. His lids come down over his quick eyes, till he can see you very sharply, and you can hardly see that he can see you. He can break into a smile at any moment, which has no connection with him, as it were. By a certain hurt look, however, when bidding is slow, he discloses that he is not merely an auctioneer, but has in him elements of the human being. He can wink with anyone, and is dressed in a snuff-brown suit, with a perfectly unbuttoned waistcoat, a low, turned-down collar, and small black and white sailor-knot tie. While he is settling his papers, the HILLCRISTS settle themselves tensely. CHLOE has drunk her water and leaned back again, with the smelling salts to her nose. ROLF leans forward in the seat beside her, looking sideways at JILL. A SOLICITOR, with a grey beard, has joined the AUCTIONEER at his table.*]

AUCTIONEER. [*Tapping the table*] Sorry to disappoint you, gentlemen, but I've only one property to offer you to-day, No. 1, The Centry, Deepwater. The second on the particulars has been withdrawn. The third—that's Bidcot, desirable freehold mansion and farmlands in the Parish of Kenway—we shall have to deal with next week. I shall be happy to sell it you then without reservation. [*He looks again through the particulars in his hand, giving the audience time to readjust themselves to his statements.*] Now, gen'lemen, as I say, I've only the one property to sell. Freehold No. 1—all that very desirable corn and stock-rearing and park-like residential land known as the Centry, Deepwater, unique property—an A 1 chance to an A 1 audience. [*With his smile.*] Ought to make the price of the three we thought we had. Now you won't mind listening to the conditions of sale; Mr. Blinkard'll read 'em, and they won't wirry you, they're very short. [*He sits down and gives two little taps on the table.*]

[*The SOLICITOR rises and reads the conditions of sale in a voice which no one practically can hear. Just as he begins to read these conditions of sale, CHARLES HORNBLOWER enters at back. He stands a moment, glancing round at the HILLCRISTS and twirling his moustache, then moves along to his wife and touches her.*]

CHARLES. Chloe, aren't you well?

[*In the start which she gives, her face is fully revealed to the audience.*]

CHARLES. Come along, out of the way of these people. [*He jerks his head towards the HILLCRISTS. CHLOE gives a swift look down to the stage Right of the audience.*]

CHLOE. No; I'm all right; it's hotter there.

CHARLES. [*To ROLF*] Well, look after her—I must go back.

[*ROLF nods. CHARLES slides back to the door, with a glance at the HILLCRISTS, of whom MRS. HILLCRIST has been watching like a lynx. He goes out, just as the SOLICITOR, finishing, sits down.*]

AUCTIONEER. [*Rising and tapping*] Now, gen'lemen, it's not often a piece of land like this comes into the market. What's that? [*To a friend in front of him*] No better land in Deepwater

—that's right, Mr. Spicer. I know the village well, and a charming place it is; perfect locality, to be sure. Now I don't want to worry you by singing the praises of this property; there it is—well-watered, nicely timbered—no reservation of the timber, gen'lemen—no tenancy to hold you up; free to do what you like with it to-morrow. You've got a jewel of a site there, too; perfect position for a house. It lies between the Duke's and Squire Hillcrist's—an emerald isle. [*With his smile*] No allusion to Ireland, gen'lemen—perfect peace in the Centry. Nothing like it in the county—a gen'leman's site, and you don't get that offered you every day. [*He looks down towards HORN-BLOWER, stage Left.*] Carries the mineral rights, and as you know, perhaps, there's the very valuable Deepwater clay there. What am I to start it at? Can I say three thousand? Well, anything you like to give me. I'm not particular. Come now, you've got more time than me, I expect. Two hundred acres of first-rate grazin' and cornland, with a site for a residence unequalled in the county; and all the possibilities? Well, what shall I say? [*Bid from SPICER.*] Two thousand? [*With his smile*] That won't hurt you, Mr. Spicer. Why, it's worth that to overlook the Duke. For two thousand? [*Bid from HORNBLLOWER, stage Left.*] And five. Thank you, sir. Two thousand five hundred bid. [*To a friend just below him*] Come, Mr. Sandy, don't scratch your head over it. [*Bid from DAWKER, stage Right.*] And five. Three thousand bid for this desirable property. Why, you'd think it wasn't desirable. Come along, gen'lemen. A little spirit. [*A slight pause.*]

JILL. Why can't I see the bids, Dodo?

HILLCRIST. The last was Dawker's.

AUCTIONEER. For three thousand. [*HORNBLLOWER.*] Three thousand five hundred? May I say four? [*A bid from the centre.*] No, I'm not particular; I'll take hundreds. Three thousand six hundred bid. [*HORNBLLOWER.*] And seven. Three thousand seven hundred, and——

[*He pauses, quartering the audience.*]

JILL. Who was that, Dodo?

HILLCRIST. Hornblower. It's the Duke in the centre.

AUCTIONEER. Come, gen'lemen, don't keep me all day. Four thousand may I say? [DAWKER.] Thank you. We're beginning. And one? [*A bid from the centre.*] Four thousand one hundred. [HORNBLOWER.] Four thousand two hundred. May I have yours, sir? [*To DAWKER.*] And three. Four thousand three hundred bid. No such site in the county, gen'lemen. I'm going to sell this land for what it's worth. You can't bid too much for me. [*He smiles.*] [HORNBLOWER.] Four thousand five hundred bid. [*Bid from the centre.*] And six. [DAWKER.] And seven. [HORNBLOWER.] And eight. Nine, may I say? [*But the centre has dried up.*] [DAWKER.] And nine. [HORNBLOWER.] Five thousand. Five thousand bid. That's better; there's some spirit in it. For five thousand. [*He pauses while he speaks to the SOLICITOR.*]

HILLCRIST. It's a duel now.

AUCTIONEER. Now, gen'lemen, I'm not going to give this property away. Five thousand bid. [DAWKER.] And one. [HORNBLOWER.] And two. [DAWKER.] And three. Five thousand three hundred bid. And five, did you say, sir? [HORNBLOWER.] Five thousand five hundred bid.

[*He looks at his particulars.*]

JILL. [*Rather agonized*] Enemy, Dodo.

AUCTIONEER. This chance may never come again.

“How you'll regret it
If you don't get it,”

as the poet says. May I say five thousand six hundred, sir? [DAWKER.] Five thousand six hundred bid. [HORNBLOWER.] And seven. [DAWKER.] And eight. For five thousand eight hundred pounds. We're gettin' on, but we haven't got the value yet.

[*A slight pause, while he wipes his brow at the success of his own efforts.*]

JILL. Us, Dodo?

[HILLCRIST nods. JILL looks over at ROLF, whose face is

grimly set. CHLOE has never moved. MRS. HILLCRIST *whispers to her husband.*

AUCTIONEER. Five thousand eight hundred bid. For five thousand eight hundred. Come along, gen'lemen, come along. We're not beaten. Thank you, sir. [HORNBLLOWER.] Five thousand nine hundred. And——? [DAWKER.] Six thousand. Six thousand bid. Six thousand bid. For six thousand! The Centry—most desirable spot in the county—going for the low price of six thousand.

HILLCRIST. [*Muttering*] Low! Heavens!

AUCTIONEER. Any advance on six thousand? Come, gen'lemen, we haven't dried up? A little spirit. Six thousand? For six thousand? For six thousand pounds? Very well, I'm selling. For six thousand once—[*He taps.*] For six thousand twice—[*He taps.*]

JILL. [*Low*] Oh! we've got it!

AUCTIONEER. And one, sir? [HORNBLLOWER.] Six thousand one hundred bid.

[*The SOLICITOR touches his arm and says something, to which the AUCTIONEER responds with a nod.*]

MRS. H. Blow your nose, Jack. [HILLCRIST *blows his nose.*]

AUCTIONEER. For six thousand one hundred. [DAWKER.] And two. Thank you. [HORNBLLOWER.] And three. For six thousand three hundred. [DAWKER.] And four. For six thousand four hundred pounds. This coveted property. For six thousand four hundred pounds. Why, it's giving it away, gen'lemen. [*A pause.*]

MRS. H. Giving!

AUCTIONEER. Six thousand four hundred bid. [HORNBLLOWER.] And five. [DAWKER.] And six. [HORNBLLOWER.] And seven. [DAWKER.] And eight.

[*A pause, during which, through the door Left, someone beckons to the SOLICITOR, who rises and confers.*]

HILLCRIST. [*Muttering*] I've done if that doesn't get it.

AUCTIONEER. For six thousand eight hundred. For six thousand eight hundred—once—[*He taps*] twice—[*He taps.*]

For the last time. This dominating site. [HORBLOWER.]
And nine. Thank you. For six thousand nine hundred.

[HILLCRIST has taken out his handkerchief]

JILL. Oh! Dodo!

MRS. H. [Quivering] Don't give in!

AUCTIONEER. Seven thousand may I say? [DAWKER.]
Seven thousand.

MRS. H. [Whispers] Keep it down; don't show him.

AUCTIONEER. For seven thousand—going for seven thousand
—once—[Taps] twice—[Taps.] [HORBLOWER.] And one.
Thank you, sir.

[HILLCRIST blows his nose. JILL, with a choke, leans back in
her seat and folds her arms tightly on her chest. MRS. HILLCRIST
passes her handkerchief over her lips, sitting perfectly still.
HILLCRIST too is motionless.

[The AUCTIONEER has paused, and is talking to the SOLICITOR,
who has returned to his seat.

MRS. H. Oh! Jack.

JILL. Stick it, Dodo; stick it!

AUCTIONEER. Now gen'lemen, I have a bid of seven
thousand one hundred for the Centry. And I'm instructed to
sell if I can't get more. It's a fair price, but not a big price. [To
his friend MR. SPICER.] A thumpin' price? [With his smile.]
Well, you're a judge of thumpin', I admit. Now, who'll give
me seven thousand two hundred? What, no one? Well, I
can't make you, gen'lemen. For seven thousand one hundred
Once—[Taps.] Twice—[Taps.] [JILL utters a little groan.

HILLCRIST. [Suddenly, in a queer voice] Two.

AUCTIONEER. [Turning with surprise and looking up to
receive HILLCRIST's nod] Thank you, sir. And two. Seven
thousand two hundred. [He screws himself round so as to
command both HILLCRIST and HORBLOWER.] May I have
yours, sir? [HORBLOWER.] And three. [HILLCRIST.] And
four. Seven thousand four hundred. For seven thousand four
hundred. [HORBLOWER.] Five. [HILLCRIST.] Six. For
seven thousand six hundred. [A pause.] Well, gen'lemen, this

is better, but a record property shid fetch a record price. The possibilities are enormous. [HORNBLLOWER.] Eight thousand did you say, sir? Eight thousand. Going for eight thousand pounds. [HILLCRIST.] And one. [HORNBLLOWER.] And two. [HILLCRIST.] And three. [HORNBLLOWER.] And four. [HILLCRIST.] And five. For eight thousand five hundred. A wonderful property for eight thousand five hundred.

[He wipes his brow.

JILL. [*Whispering*] Oh, Dodo!

MRS. H. That's enough, Jack, we must stop some time.

AUCTIONEER. For eight thousand five hundred. Once—[*Taps.*] Twice—[*Taps.*] [HORNBLLOWER.] Six hundred. [HILLCRIST.] Seven. May I have yours, sir? [HORNBLLOWER.] Eight.

HILLCRIST. Nine thousand. [MRS. HILLCRIST *looks at him, biting her lips, but he is quite absorbed.*

AUCTIONEER. Nine thousand for this astounding property. Why, the Duke would pay that if he realized he'd be overlooked. Now, sir? [*To HORNBLLOWER. No response.*] Just a little raise on that. [*No response.*] For nine thousand. The Centry, Deepwater, for nine thousand. Once—[*Taps.*] Twice—[*Taps.*]

JILL. [*Under her breath*] Ours!

A VOICE. [*From far back in the centre.*] And five hundred.

AUCTIONEER. [*Surprised and throwing out his arms towards the voice*] And five hundred. For nine thousand five hundred. May I have yours, sir? [*He looks at HORNBLLOWER. No response.*] [*The SOLICITOR speaks to him.*

MRS. H. [*Whispering*] It must be the Duke again.

HILLCRIST. [*Passing his hand over his brow*] That's stopped him, any way.

AUCTIONEER. [*Looking at HILLCRIST*] For nine thousand five hundred? [HILLCRIST *shakes his head.*] Once more. The Centry, Deepwater, for nine thousand five hundred. Once—[*Taps.*] Twice—[*Taps.*] [*He pauses and looks again at HORNBLLOWER and HILLCRIST.*] For the last time—at nine

thousand five hundred. [Taps.] [With a look towards the bidder] Mr. Smalley. Well! [With great satisfaction.] That's that! No more to-day, gen'lemen.

[The AUCTIONEER and SOLICITOR busy themselves. The room begins to empty.]

MRS. H. Smalley? Smalley? Is that the Duke's agent? Jack!

HILLCRIST. [Coming out of a sort of coma, after the excitement he has been going through] What! What!

JILL. Oh, Dodo! How splendidly you stuck it!

HILLCRIST. Phew! What a squeak! I was clean out of my depth. A mercy the Duke chipped in again.

MRS. H. [Looking at ROLF and CHLOE, who are standing up as if about to go] Take care; they can hear you. Find Dawker, Jack.

[Below, the AUCTIONEER and SOLICITOR take up their papers, and move out Left.]

[HILLCRIST stretches himself, standing up, as if to throw off the strain. The door behind is opened, and HORNBLLOWER appears.]

HORNBLLOWER. Ye ran me up a pretty price. Ye bid very pluckily, Hillcrist. But ye didn't quite get my measure.

HILLCRIST. Oh! It was my nine thousand the Duke capped. Thank God, the Centry's gone to a gentleman!

HORNBLLOWER. The Duke? [He laughs.] No, the Centry's not gone to a gentleman, nor to a fool. It's gone to me.

HILLCRIST. What!

HORNBLLOWER. I'm sorry for ye; ye're not fit to manage these things. Well, it's a monstrous price, and I've had to pay it because of your obstinacy. I shan't forget that when I come to build.

HILLCRIST. D'you mean to say that bid was for you?

HORNBLLOWER. Of course I do. I told ye I was a bad man to be up against. Perhaps ye'll believe me now.

HILLCRIST. A dastardly trick!

HORNBLLOWER. [With venom] What did ye call it—a skin game? Remember we're playin' a skin game, Hillcrist.

HILLCRIST. [Clenching his fists] If we were younger men——

HORNBLOWER. Ay! 'Twouldn't look pretty for us to be at fisticuffs. We'll leave the fightin' to the young ones. [*He glances at ROLF and JILL; suddenly throwing out his finger at ROLF.*] No makin' up to that young woman! I've watched ye. And as for you, missy, you leave my boy alone.

JILL. [*With suppressed passion*] Dodo, may I spit in his eye or something?

HILLCRIST. Sit down. [*JILL sits down. He stands between her and HORNBLOWER.*] You've won this round, sir, by a foul blow. We shall see whether you can take any advantage of it. I believe the law can stop you ruining my property.

HORNBLOWER. Make your mind easy; it can't. I've got ye in a noose, and I'm goin' to hang ye.

MRS. H. [*Suddenly*] Mr. Hornblower, as you fight foul—so shall we.

HILLCRIST. Amy!

MRS. H. [*Paying no attention*] And it will not be foul play towards you and yours. You are outside the pale.

HORNBLOWER. That's just where I am, outside *your* pale all round ye. Ye're not long for Deepwater, ma'am. Make your dispositions to go; ye'll be out in six months, I prophesy. And good riddance to the neighbourhood.

[*They are all down on the level now.*]

CHLOE. [*Suddenly coming closer to MRS. HILLCRIST*] Here are your salts, thank you. Father, can't you——?

HORNBLOWER. [*Surprised*] Can't I what!

CHLOE. Can't you come to an arrangement?

MRS. H. Just so, Mr. Hornblower. Can't you?

HORNBLOWER. [*Looking from one to the other*] As we're speakin' out, ma'am, it's your behaviour to my daughter-in-law—who's as good as you—and better, to my thinking—that's more than half the reason why I've bought this property. Ye've fair got my dander up. Now it's no use to bandy words. It's very forgivin' of ye, Chloe, but come along!

MRS. H. Quite seriously, Mr. Hornblower, you had better come to an arrangement.

HORNBLOWER. Mrs. Hillcrist, ladies should keep to their own business.

MRS. H. I will.

HILLCRIST. Amy, do leave it to us men. You, young man [*he speaks to ROLF*] do you support your father's trick this afternoon?

[*JILL looks round at ROLF, who tries to speak, when HORNBLOWER breaks in.*]

HORNBLOWER. My trick? And what d'ye call it, to try and put me own son against me?

JILL. [*To ROLF*] Well?

ROLF. I don't, but——

HORNBLOWER. Trick? Ye young cub, be quiet. Mr. Hillcrist had an agent bid for him—I had an agent bid for me. Only his agent bid at the beginnin', an' mine bid at the end. What's the trick in that? [*He laughs.*]

HILLCRIST. Hopeless; we're in different worlds.

HORNBLOWER. I wish to God we were! Come you, Chloe. And you, Rolf, you follow. In six months I'll have those chimneys up, and me lorries runnin' round ye.

MRS. H. Mr. Hornblower, if you build——

HORNBLOWER. [*Looking at MRS. HILLCRIST*] Ye know—it's laughable. Ye make me pay nine thousand five hundred for a bit o' land not worth four, and ye think I'm not to get back on ye. I'm goin' on with as little consideration as if ye were a family of blackbeetles. Good afternoon!

ROLF. Father!

JILL. Oh, Dodo! He's obscene.

HILLCRIST. Mr. Hornblower, my compliments.

[*HORNBLOWER, with a stare at HILLCRIST's half-smiling face, takes CHLOE's arm, and half drags her towards the door on the Left. But there, in the opened doorway, are standing DAWKER and a STRANGER. They move just out of the way of the exit, looking at CHLOE, who sways and very nearly falls.*]

HORNBLOWER. Why! Chloe! What's the matter?

CHLOE. I don't know; I'm not well to-day. [*She pulls herself together with a great effort.*]

MRS. H. [*Who has exchanged a nod with DAWKER and the STRANGER*] Mr. Hornblower, you build at your peril. I warn you.

HORNBLOWER. [*Turning round to speak*] Ye think yourself very cool and very smart. But I doubt this is the first time ye've been up against realities. Now, I've been up against them all my life. Don't talk to me, ma'am, about peril and that sort of nonsense; it makes no impression. Your husband called me pachydermatous. I don't know Greek, and Latin, and all that, but I've looked it out in the dictionary, and I find it means thick-skinned. And I'm none the worse for that when I have to deal with folk like you. Good afternoon.

[*He draws CHLOE forward, and they pass through the door followed quickly by ROLF.*]

MRS. H. Thank you, Dawker. [*She moves up to DAWKER and the STRANGER, Left, and they talk.*]

JILL. Dodo! It's awful!

HILLCRIST. Well, there's nothing for it now but to smile and pay up. Poor old home! It shall be his wash-pot. Over the Centry will he cast his shoe. By Gad, Jill, I could cry!

JILL. [*Pointing*] Look! Chloe's sitting down. She nearly fainted just now. It's something to do with Dawker, Dodo, and that man with him. Look at mother! Ask them?

HILLCRIST. Dawker! [*DAWKER comes to him, followed by MRS. HILLCRIST.*] What's the mystery about young Mrs. Hornblower?

DAWKER. No mystery.

HILLCRIST. Well, what is it?

MRS. H. You'd better not ask.

HILLCRIST. I wish to know.

MRS. H. Jill, go out and wait for us.

JILL. Nonsense, mother.

MRS. H. It's not for a girl to hear.

JILL. Bosh! I read the papers every day.

DAWKER. It's nothin' worse than you get there, anyway.

MRS. H. Do you wish your daughter——

JILL. It's ridiculous, Dodo; you'd think I was mother at my age.

MRS. H. I was not so proud of my knowledge.

JILL. No, but you had it, dear.

HILLCRIST. What is it—what is it? Come over here, Dawker. [DAWKER goes to him, Right, and speaks in a low voice.] What! [Again DAWKER speaks in a low voice.] Good God!

MRS. H. Exactly!

JILL. Poor thing—whatever it is!

MRS. H. Poor thing?

JILL. What went before, mother?

MRS. H. It's what's coming after that matters, luckily.

HILLCRIST. How do you know this?

DAWKER. My friend here [*He points to the STRANGER*] was one of the agents.

HILLCRIST. It's shocking. I'm sorry I heard it.

MRS. H. I told you not to.

HILLCRIST. Ask your friend to come here.

[DAWKER beckons, and the STRANGER joins the group.]
Are you sure of what you've said, sir?

STRANGER. Perfectly. I remember her quite well; her name then was——

HILLCRIST. I don't want to know, thank you. I'm truly sorry. I wouldn't wish the knowledge of that about his women-folk to my worst enemy. This mustn't be spoken of.

[JILL hugs his arm.]

MRS. H. It will not be if Mr. Hornblower is wise. If he is not wise, it must be spoken of.

HILLCRIST. I say no, Amy. I won't have it. It's a dirty weapon. Who touches pitch shall be defiled.

MRS. H. Well, what weapons does he use against us? Don't be quixotic. For all we can tell, they know it quite well already, and if they don't they ought to. Anyway, to know this is our salvation, and we must use it.

JILL. [*Sotto voce*] Pitch! Dodo! Pitch!

DAWKER. The threat's enough! J.P.—Chapel—Future member for the constituency——

HILLCRIST. [*A little more doubtfully*] To use a piece of knowledge about a woman—it's repugnant. I—I won't do it.

MRS. H. If you had a son tricked into marrying such a woman, would you wish to remain ignorant of it?

HILLCRIST. [*Struck*] I don't know—I don't know.

MRS. H. At least you'd like to be in a position to help him, if you thought it necessary?

HILLCRIST. Well—that—perhaps.

MRS. H. Then you agree that Mr. Hornblower at least should be told. What he does with the knowledge is not our affair.

HILLCRIST. [*Half to the STRANGER and half to DAWKER*] Do you realize that an imputation of that kind may be ground for a criminal libel action?

STRANGER. Quite. But there's no shadow of doubt; not the faintest. You saw her just now?

HILLCRIST. I did. [*Revolting again*] No; I don't like it.

[*DAWKER has drawn the STRANGER a step or two away, and they talk together.*]

MRS. H. [*In a low voice*] And the ruin of our home? You're betraying your fathers, Jack.

HILLCRIST. I can't bear bringing a woman into it.

MRS. H. We don't. If anyone brings her in, it will be Hornblower himself.

HILLCRIST. We use her secret as a lever.

MRS. H. I tell you quite plainly: I will only consent to holding my tongue about her if you agree to Hornblower being told. It's a scandal to have a woman like that in the neighbourhood.

JILL. Mother means that, father.

HILLCRIST. Jill, keep quiet. This is a very bitter position. I can't tell what to do.

MRS. H. You must use this knowledge. You owe it to me—to us all. You'll see that when you've thought it over.

JILL. [*Softly*] Pitch, Dodo, pitch!

MRS. H. [*Furiously*] Jill, be quiet!

HILLCRIST. I was brought up never to hurt a woman. I can't do it, Amy—I can't do it. I should never feel like a gentleman again.

MRS. H. [*Coldly*] Oh! Very well.

HILLCRIST. What d'you mean by that?

MRS. H. I shall use the knowledge in my own way.

HILLCRIST. [*Staring at her*] You would—against my wishes?

MRS. H. I consider it my duty.

HILLCRIST. If I agree to Hornblower being told——

MRS. H. That's all I want.

HILLCRIST. It's the utmost I'll consent to, Amy; and don't let's have any humbug about its being morally necessary. We do it to save our skins.

MRS. H. I don't know what you mean by humbug?

JILL. He means humbug, mother.

HILLCRIST. It must stop at old Hornblower. Do you quite understand?

MRS. H. Quite.

JILL. Will it stop?

MRS. H. Jill, if you can't keep your impertinence to yourself——

HILLCRIST. Jill, come with me.

[*He turns towards door, Back.*]

JILL. I'm sorry, mother. Only it is a skin game, isn't it?

MRS. H. You pride yourself on plain speech, Jill. I pride myself on plain thought. You will thank me afterwards that I can see realities. I know we are better people than these Hornblowers. Here we are going to stay, and they—are not.

JILL. [*Looking at her with a sort of unwilling admiration*] Mother, you're wonderful!

HILLCRIST. Jill!

JILL. Coming, Dodo.

[*She turns and runs to the door. They go out. MRS. HILLCRIST, with a long sigh, draws herself up, fine and proud.*]

MRS. H. Dawker! [*He comes to her.*] I shall send him a note to-night, and word it so that he will be bound to come and see us to-morrow morning. Will you be in the study just before eleven o'clock, with this gentleman?

DAWKER. [*Nodding*] We're going to wire for his partner. I'll bring him too. Can't make too sure. [*She goes firmly up the steps and out.*]

DAWKER. [*To the STRANGER, with a wink*] The Squire's squeamish—too much of a gentleman. But he don't count. The grey mare's all right. You wire to Henry. I'm off to our solicitors. We'll make that old rhinoceros sell us back the Centry at a decent price. These Hornblowers—[*Laying his finger on his nose*] We've got 'em!

The curtain falls

SCENE II

CHLOE's boudoir at half-past seven the same evening. *A pretty room. No pictures on the walls, but two mirrors. A screen and a luxurious couch on the fireplace side, stage Left. A door rather Right of Centre Back, opening inwards. A French window, Right forward. A writing table, Right Back. Electric light burning.*

CHLOE, in a tea-gown, is standing by the forward end of the sofa, very still, and very pale. Her lips are parted, and her large eyes stare straight before them as if seeing ghosts. The door is opened noiselessly and a WOMAN's face is seen. It peers at CHLOE, vanishes, and the door is closed. CHLOE raises her hands, covers her eyes with them, drops them with a quick gesture, and looks round her. A knock. With a swift movement she slides on to the sofa, and lies prostrate, with eyes closed.

CHLOE. [*Feebly*] Come in! [*Her MAID enters; a trim, contained figure of uncertain years, in a black dress, with the face which was peering in.*] Yes, Anna?

ANNA. Aren't you going in to dinner, ma'am?

CHLOE. [*With closed eyes*] No.

ANNA. Will you take anything here, ma'am?

CHLOE. I'd like a biscuit and a glass of champagne. [*The MAID, who is standing between sofa and door, smiles. CHLOE, with a swift look, catches the smile.*] Why do you smile?

ANNA. Was I, ma'am?

CHLOE. You know you were. [*Fiercely*] Are you paid to smile at me?

ANNA. [*Immovable*] No, ma'am. Would you like some eau-de-Cologne on your forehead?

CHLOE. Yes.—No.—What's the good? [*Clasping her forehead*] My headache won't go.

ANNA. To keep lying down's the best thing for it.

CHLOE. I have been—hours.

ANNA. [*With the smile*] Yes, ma'am.

CHLOE. [*Gathering herself up on the sofa*] Anna! Why do you do it?

ANNA. Do what, ma'am?

CHLOE. Spy on me.

ANNA. I—never! I——!

CHLOE. To spy! You're a fool, too. What is there to spy on?

ANNA. Nothing, ma'am. Of course, if you're not satisfied with me, I must give notice. Only—if I were spying, I should expect to have notice given me. I've been accustomed to ladies who wouldn't stand such a thing for a minute.

CHLOE. [*Intently*] Well, you'll take a month's wages and go to-morrow. And that's all, now.

[ANNA inclines her head and goes out.

[CHLOE, with a sort of moan, turns over and buries her face in the cushion.

CHLOE. [*Sitting up*] If I could see that man—if only—or Dawker——

[*She springs up and goes to the door, but hesitates, and comes back to the head of the sofa, as ROLF comes in. During this scene the door is again opened stealthily, an inch or two.*

ROLF. How's the head?

CHLOE. Beastly, thanks. I'm not going in to dinner.

ROLF. Is there anything I can do for you?

CHLOE. No, dear boy. [*Suddenly looking at him*] You don't want this quarrel with the Hillcrists to go on, do you, Rolf?

ROLF. No; I hate it.

CHLOE. Well, I think I *might* be able to stop it. Will you slip round to Dawker's—it's not five minutes—and ask him to come and see me.

ROLF. Father and Charlie wouldn't—

CHLOE. I know. But if he comes to the window here while you're at dinner, I'll let him in, and out, and nobody'd know.

ROLF. [*Astonished*] Yes, but what—I mean how—

CHLOE. Don't ask me. It's worth the shot—that's all. [*Looking at her wrist-watch*] To this window at eight o'clock exactly. First long window on the terrace, tell him.

ROLF. It's nothing Charlie would mind?

CHLOE. No; only I can't tell him—he and father are so mad about it all.

ROLF. If there's a real chance—

CHLOE. [*Going to the window and opening it*] This way, Rolf. If you don't come back I shall know he's coming. Put your watch by mine. [*Looking at his watch*] It's a minute fast, see!

ROLF. Look here, Chloc—

CHLOE. Don't wait; go on. [*She almost pushes him out through the window, closes it after him, draws the curtains again, stands a minute, thinking hard; goes to the bell and rings it; then, crossing to the writing-table, Right Back, she takes out a chemist's prescription.*]

[*ANNA comes in.*]

CHLOE. I don't want that champagne. Take this to the chemist and get him to make up some of these cachets quick, and bring them back yourself.

ANNA. Yes, ma'am; but you have some.

CHLOE. They're too old; I've taken two—the strength's out of them. Quick, please; I can't stand this head.

ANNA. [*Taking the prescription—with her smile*] Yes, ma'am. It'll take some time—you don't want me?

CHLOE. No; I want the cachets. [ANNA goes out.]

[CHLOE looks at her wrist-watch, goes to the writing-table, which is old-fashioned, with a secret drawer, looks round her, dives at the secret drawer, takes out a roll of notes and a tissue paper parcel. She counts the notes: "Three hundred." Slips them into her breast and unwraps the little parcel. It contains pearls. She slips them too into her dress, looks round startled, replaces the drawer, and regains her place on the sofa, lying prostrate as the door opens, and HORNBLLOWER comes in. She does not open her eyes, and he stands looking at her a moment before speaking.]

HORNBLLOWER. [*Almost softly*] How are ye feelin', Chloe?

CHLOE. Awful head!

HORNBLLOWER. Can ye attend a moment? I've had a note from that woman. [CHLOE sits up.]

HORNBLLOWER. [*Reading*] "I have something of the utmost importance to tell you in regard to your daughter-in-law. I shall be waiting to see you at eleven o'clock to-morrow morning. The matter is so utterly vital to the happiness of all your family that I cannot imagine you will fail to come." Now, what's the meaning of it? Is it sheer impudence, or lunacy, or what?

CHLOE. I don't know.

HORNBLLOWER. [*Not unkindly*] Chloe, if there's anything—ye'd better tell me. Forewarned's forearmed.

CHLOE. There's nothing; unless it's—[*With a quick look at him.*—Unless it's that my father was a—a bankrupt.]

HORNBLLOWER. Hech! Many a man's been that. Ye've never told us much about your family.

CHLOE. I wasn't very proud of him.

HORNBLLOWER. Well, ye're not responsible for your father. If that's all, it's a relief. The bitter snobs! I'll remember it in the account I've got with them.

CHLOE. Father, don't say anything to Charlie; it'll only worry him for nothing.

HORNBLLOWER. Na, no, I'll not. If I went bankrupt, it'd

upset Chearlie, I've not a doubt. [*He laughs. Looking at her shrewdly.*] There's nothing else, before I answer her? [CHLOE shakes her head.] Ye're sure?

CHLOE. [*With an effort*] She may invent things, of course.

HORNBLOWER. [*Lost in his feud fever*] Ah! but there's such a thing as the laws o' slander. If they play pranks, I'll have them up for it.

CHLOE. [*Timidly*] Couldn't you stop this quarrel, father? You said it was on my account. But I don't want to know them. And they do love their old home. I like the girl. You don't really need to build just there, do you? Couldn't you stop it? Do?

HORNBLOWER. Stop it? Now I've bought? Na, no! The snobs defied me, and I'm going to show them. I hate the lot of them, and I hate that little Dawker worst of all.

CHLOE. He's only their agent.

HORNBLOWER. He's a part of the whole dog-in-the-manger system that stands in my way. Ye're a woman, and ye don't understand these things. Ye wouldn't believe the struggle I've had to make my money and get my position. These county folk talk soft sawder, but to get anything from them's like gettin' butter out of a dog's mouth. If they could drive me out of here by fair means or foul, would they hesitate a moment? Not they! See what they've made me pay; and look at this letter. Selfish, mean lot o' hypocrites!

CHLOE. But they didn't begin the quarrel.

HORNBLOWER. Not openly; but underneath they did—that's their way. They began it by thwartin' me here and there and everywhere, just because I've come into me own a bit later than they did. I gave 'em their chance, and they wouldn't take it. Well, I'll show 'em what a man like me can do when he sets his mind to it. I'll not leave much skin on them. [*In the intensity of his feeling he has lost sight of her face, alive with a sort of agony of doubt, whether to plead with him further, or what to do. Then, with a swift glance at her wrist-watch, she falls back on the sofa and closes her eyes.*] It'll give me a power of enjoyment

seen' me chimneys go up in front of their windies. That was a bonnie thought—that last bid o' mine. He'd got that roused up, I believe he never would a' stopped. [*Looking at her*] I forgot your head. Well, well, ye'll be best lyin' quiet. [*The gong sounds.*] Shall we send ye something in from dinner?

CHLOE. No; I'll try to sleep. Please tell them I don't want to be disturbed.

HORNBLOWER. All right. I'll just answer this note.

[*He sits down at her writing-table.*]

[CHLOE starts up from the sofa feverishly, looking at her watch, at the window, at her watch; then softly crosses to the window and opens it.]

HORNBLOWER. [*Finishing*] Listen! [*He turns round towards the sofa.*] Hallo! Where are ye?

CHLOE. [*At the window*] It's so hot.

HORNBLOWER. Here's what I've said:

“MADAM,—You can tell me nothing of my daughter-in-law which can affect the happiness of my family. I regard your note as an impertinence, and I shall not be with you at eleven o'clock to-morrow morning.

“Yours truly——”

CHLOE. [*With a suffering movement of her head*] Oh!—Well!——

[*The gong is touched a second time.*]

HORNBLOWER. [*Crossing to the door*] Lie ye down, and get a sleep. I'll tell them not to disturb ye; and I hope ye'll be all right to-morrow. Good-night, Chloe.

CHLOE. Good-night.

[*He goes out.*]

[*After a feverish turn or two, CHLOE returns to the open window and waits there, half screened by the curtains. The door is opened inch by inch, and ANNA's head peers round. Seeing where CHLOE is, she slips in and passes behind the screen, Left. Suddenly CHLOE backs in from the window.*]

CHLOE. [*In a low voice*] Come in. [*She darts to the door and locks it.*]

[DAWKER has come in through the window and stands regarding her with a half smile.]

DAWKER. Well, young woman, what do you want of me?

[*In the presence of this man of her own class, there comes a distinct change in CHLOE'S voice and manner; a sort of frank commonness, adapted to the man she is dealing with, but she keeps her voice low.*]

CHLOE. You're making a mistake, you know.

DAWKER. [*With a broad grin*] No. I've got a memory for faces.

CHLOE. I say you are.

DAWKER. [*Turning to go*] If that's all, you needn't 'ave troubled me to come.

CHLOE. No. Don't go! [*With a faint smile.*] You *are* playing a game with me. Aren't you ashamed? What harm have I done you? Do you call this cricket?

DAWKER. No, my girl—business.

CHLOE. [*Bitterly*] What have I to do with this quarrel? I couldn't help their falling out.

DAWKER. That's your misfortune.

CHLOE. [*Clasping her hands*] You're a cruel fellow if you can spoil a woman's life who never did you an ounce of harm.

DAWKER. So they *don't* know about you. That's all right. Now, look here, I serve my employer. But I'm flesh and blood too, and I always give as good as I get. I hate this family of yours. There's no name too bad for 'em to call me this last month, and no looks too black to give me. I tell you frankly, I hate 'em.

CHLOE. There's good in them same as in you.

DAWKER. [*With a grin*] There's no good Hornblower but a dead Hornblower.

CHLOE. But—but I'm *not* one.

DAWKER. You'll be the mother of some, I shouldn't wonder.

CHLOE. [*Stretching out her hand—pathetically*] Oh! leave me alone, do! I'm happy here. Be a sport! Be a sport!

DAWKER. [*Disconcerted for a second*] You can't get at me, so don't try it on.

CHLOE. I had such a bad time in old days.

[DAWKER *shakes his head; his grin has disappeared and his face is like wood.*

CHLOE. [*Panting*] Ah! do! You might! You've been fond of some woman, I suppose. Think of her!

DAWKER. [*Decisively*] It won't do, Mrs. Chloe. You're a pawn in the game, and I'm going to use you.

CHLOE. [*Despairingly*] What is it to you? [*With a sudden touch of the tigress*] Look here! Don't you make an enemy of me. I haven't dragged through hell for nothing. Women like me can bite, I tell you.

DAWKER. That's better. I'd rather have a woman threaten than whine, any day. Threaten away! You'll let 'em know that you met me on the Promenade one night. Of course you'll let 'em know that, won't you?—or that——

CHLOE. Be quiet! Oh! Be quiet! [*Taking from her bosom the notes and the pearls*] Look! There's my savings—there's all I've got! The pearls'll fetch nearly a thousand. [*Holding it out to him*] Take it, and drop me out—won't you? Won't you?

DAWKER. [*Passing his tongue over his lips—with a hard little laugh*] You mistake your man, missis. I'm a plain dog, if you like, but I'm faithful, and I hold fast. Don't try those games on me.

CHLOE. [*Losing control*] You're a beast!—a beast! a cruel, cowardly beast! And how dare you bribe that woman here to spy on me? Oh! yes, you do; you know you do. If you drove me mad, you wouldn't care. You beast!

DAWKER. Now, don't carry on! That won't help you.

CHLOE. What d'you call it—to dog a woman down like this, just because you happen to have a quarrel with a man?

DAWKER. Who made the quarrel? Not me, missis. You ought to know that in a row it's the weak and helpless—we won't say the innocent—that get it in the neck. That can't be helped.

CHLOE. [*Regarding him intently*] I hope your mother or your sister, if you've got any, may go through what I'm going through ever since you got on my track. I hope they'll know what fear means. I hope they'll love and find out that it's hanging on a

thread, and—and—— Oh! you coward, you persecuting coward! Call yourself a man!

DAWKER. [*With his grin*] Ah! You look quite pretty like that. By George! you're a handsome woman when you're roused.

[CHLOE'S passion fades out as quickly as it blazed up. She sinks down on the sofa, shudders, looks here and there, and then for a moment up at him.]

CHLOE. Is there anything you'll take, not to spoil my life? [*Clasping her hands on her breast; under her breath*] Me?

DAWKER. [*Wiping his brow*] By God! That's an offer. [*He recoils towards the window.*] You—you touched me there. Look here! I've got to use you and I'm going to use you, but I'll do my best to let you down as easy as I can. No, I don't want anything you can give me—that is— [*He wipes his brow again.*] I'd like it—but I won't take it. [CHLOE buries her face in her hands.] There! Keep your pecker up; don't cry. Good-night! [*He goes through the window.*]

CHLOE. [*Springing up*] Ugh! Rat in a trap! Rat——! [*She stands listening; flies to the door, unlocks it, and, going back to the sofa, lies down and closes her eyes.* CHARLES comes in very quietly and stands over her, looking to see if she is asleep. She opens her eyes.]

CHARLES. Well, Clo! Had a sleep, old girl?

CHLOE. Ye—es.

CHARLES. [*Sitting on the arm of the sofa and caressing her*] Feel better, dear?

CHLOE. Yes, better, Charlie.

CHARLES. That's right. Would you like some soup?

CHLOE. [*With a shudder*] No.

CHARLES. I say—what gives you these heads? You've been very on and off all this last month.

CHLOE. I don't know. Except that—except that I *am* going to have a child, Charlie.

CHARLES. After all! By Jove! Sure?

CHLOE. [*Nodding*] Are you glad?

CHARLES. Well—I suppose I am. The gov'nor will be mighty pleased, anyway.

CHLOE. Don't tell him—yet.

CHARLES. All right! [*Bending over and drawing her to him.*] My poor girl, I'm so sorry you're seedy. Give us a kiss. [*CHLOE puts up her face and kisses him passionately.*] I say, you're like fire. You're not feverish?

CHLOE. [*With a laugh*] It's a wonder if I'm not. Charlie, are you happy with me?

CHARLES. What do you think?

CHLOE. [*Leaning against him*] You wouldn't easily believe things against me, would you?

CHARLES. What! Thinking of those Hillcrists? What the hell that woman means by her attitude towards you—— When I saw her there to-day, I had all my work cut out not to go up and give her a bit of my mind.

CHLOE. [*Watching him stealthily*] It's not good for me, now I'm like this. It's upsetting me, Charlie.

CHARLES. Yes; and we won't forget. We'll make 'em pay for it.

CHLOE. It's wretched in a little place like this. I say, must you go on spoiling their home!

CHARLES. The woman cuts you and insults you. That's enough for me.

CHLOE. [*Timidly*] Let her. I don't care; I can't bear feeling enemies about, Charlie, I—get nervous—I——

CHARLES. My dear girl! What is it? [*He looks at her intently.*]

CHLOE. I suppose it's—being like this. [*Suddenly*] But, Charlie, do stop it for my sake. Do, do!

CHARLES. [*Patting her arm*] Come, come; I say, Chloe! You're making mountains. See things in proportion. Father's paid nine thousand five hundred to get the better of those people, and you want him to chuck it away to save a woman who's insulted you. That's not sense, and it's not business. Have some pride.

CHLOE. [*Breathless*] I've got no pride, Charlie. I want to be quiet—that's all.

CHARLES. Well, if the row gets on your nerves, I can take you to the sea. But you ought to enjoy a fight with people like that.

CHLOE. [*With calculated bitterness*] No, it's nothing, of course—what *I* want.

CHARLES. Hallo! Hallo! You *are* on the jump!

CHLOE. If you want me to be a good wife to you, make father stop it.

CHARLES. [*Standing up*] Now, look here, Chloe, what's behind this?

CHLOE. [*Faintly*] Behind?

CHARLES. You're carrying on as if—as if you were really scared! We've *got* these people. We'll have them out of Deep-water in six months. It's absolute ruination to their beastly old house; we'll put the chimneys on the very edge, not three hundred yards off, and our smoke'll be drifting over them half the time. You won't have this confounded stuck-up woman here much longer. And then we can really go ahead and take our proper place. So long as she's here, we shall never do that. We've only to drive on now as fast as we can.

CHLOE. [*With a gesture*] I see.

CHARLES. [*Again looking at her*] If you go on like this, you know, I shall begin to think there's something you——

CHLOE. [*Softly*] Charlie! [*He comes to her.*] Love me!

CHARLES. [*Embracing her*] There, old girl! I know women are funny at these times. You want a good night, that's all.

CHLOE. You haven't finished dinner, have you? Go back, and I'll go to bed quite soon. Charlie, don't stop loving me.

CHARLES. Stop? Not much.

[*While he is again embracing her, ANNA steals from behind the screen to the door, opens it noiselessly, and passes through, but it clicks as she shuts it.*]

CHLOE. [*Starting violently*] Oh—h!

CHARLES. What is it? What is it? You are nervy, my dear.

CHLOE. [*Looking round with a little laugh*] I don't know. Go on, Charlie. I'll be all right when this head's gone.

CHARLES. [*Stroking her forehead and looking at her doubtfully*] You go to bed; I won't be late coming up.

[*He turns and goes, blowing a kiss from the doorway. When he is gone, CHLOE gets up and stands in precisely the attitude in which she stood at the beginning of the Act, thinking, and thinking. And the door is opened, and the face of the MAID peers round at her.*

The curtain falls.

ACT III

SCENE I

MORNING

HILLCRIST's study next morning.

[JILL, coming from Left, looks in at the open French window.

JILL. [*Speaking to ROLF, invisible*] Come in here. There's no one. [*She goes in. ROLF joins her, coming from the garden.*

ROLF. Jill, I just wanted to say—Need we? [JILL nods.] Seeing you yesterday—it did seem rotten.

JILL. *We* didn't begin it.

ROLF. No; but you don't understand. If you'd made yourself, as father has——

JILL. I hope I should be sorry.

ROLF. [*Reproachfully*] That isn't like you. Really he can't help thinking he's a public benefactor.

JILL. And we can't help thinking he's a pig. Sorry!

ROLF. If the survival of the fittest is right——

JILL. He may be fitter, but he's not going to survive.

ROLF. [*Distracted*] It looks like it though.

JILL. Is that all you came to say?

ROLF. No. Suppose we joined, couldn't we stop it?

JILL. I don't feel like joining.

ROLF. We *did* shake hands.

JILL. One can't fight and not grow bitter.

ROLF. I don't feel bitter.

JILL. Wait; you'll feel it soon enough.

ROLF. Why? [*Attentively*] About Chloe? I do think your mother's manner to her is——

JILL. Well?

ROLF. Snobbish. [JILL laughs.] She may not be your class; and that's just why it's snobbish.

JILL. I think you'd better shut up.

ROLF. What my father said was true; your mother's rudeness to her that day she came here, has made both him and Charlie ever so much more bitter. [JILL whistles the *Habanera* from "*Carmen*."] [Staring at her, rather angrily] Is it a whistling matter?

JILL. No.

ROLF. I suppose you want me to go?

JILL. Yes.

ROLF. All right. Aren't we ever going to be friends again?

JILL. [Looking steadily at him] I don't expect so.

ROLF. That's very—horrible.

JILL. Lots of horrible things in the world.

ROLF. It's our business to make them fewer, Jill.

JILL. [Fiercely] Don't be moral.

ROLF. [Hurt] That's the last thing I want to be. I only want to be friendly.

JILL. Better be real first.

ROLF. From the big point of view——

JILL. There isn't any. We're all out for our own. And why not?

ROLF. By jove, you have got——

JILL. Cynical? Your father's motto—"Every man for himself." That's the winner—hands down. Good-bye!

ROLF. Jill! Jill!

JILL. [Putting her hands behind her back, hums]:

"If auld acquaintance be forgot
And days of auld lang syne——"

ROLF. Don't! [With a pained gesture he goes out towards Left, through the French window.

[JILL, who has broken off the song, stands with her hands clenched and her lips quivering.] [FELLOWS enters Left.

FELLOWS. Mr. Dawker, Miss, and two gentlemen.

JILL. Let the three gentlemen in, and me out. [She passes him and goes out Left.

[And immediately DAWKER and the TWO STRANGERS come in-

FELLOWS. I'll inform Mrs. Hillcrist, sir. The Squire is on his rounds. *[He goes out Left.]*

[The THREE MEN gather in a discreet knot at the big bureau, having glanced at the two doors and the open French window.]

DAWKER. Now this may come into Court, you know. If there's a screw loose anywhere, better mention it. *[To SECOND STRANGER]* You knew her personally?

SECOND S. What do you think? I don't take girls on trust for that sort of job. She came to us highly recommended, too; and did her work very well. It was a double stunt—to make sure—wasn't it, George?

FIRST S. Yes; we paid her for the two visits.

SECOND S. I should know her in a minute; striking looking girl; had something in her face. Daresay she'd seen hard times.

FIRST S. We don't want publicity.

DAWKER. Not likely. The threat'll do it; but the stakes are heavy—and the man's a slogger; we must be able to push it home. If you can both swear to her, it'll do the trick.

SECOND S. And about—I mean, we're losing time, you know, coming down here.

DAWKER. *[With a nod at FIRST STRANGER]* George here knows me. That'll be all right. I'll guarantee it well worth your while.

SECOND S. I don't want to do the girl harm, if she's married.

DAWKER. No, no; nobody wants to hurt *her*. We just want a cinch on this fellow till he squeals.

[They separate a little as MRS. HILLCRIST enters from Right.]

DAWKER. Good-morning, ma'am. My friend's partner. Hornblower coming?

MRS. H. At eleven. I had to send up a second note, Dawker.

DAWKER. Squire not in?

MRS. H. I haven't told him.

DAWKER. *[Nodding]* Our friends might go in here *[Pointing Right]* and we can use 'em as we want 'em.

MRS. H. *[To the STRANGERS]* Will you make yourselves

comfortable? [*She holds the door open, and they pass her into the room, Right.*]

DAWKER. [*Showing document*] I've had this drawn and engrossed. Pretty sharp work. Conveys the Centry, and Long-meadow, to the Squire at four thousand five hundred. Now, ma'am, suppose Hornblower puts his hand to that, he'll have been done in the eye, and six thousand all told out o' pocket. You'll have a very nasty neighbour here.

MRS. H. But we shall still have the power to disclose that secret at any time.

DAWKER. Yeh! But things might happen here you could never bring home to him. You can't trust a man like that. He isn't goin' to forgive *me*, I know.

MRS. H. [*Regarding him keenly*] But if he signs, we couldn't honourably—

DAWKER. No, ma'am, *you* couldn't; and I'm sure *I* don't want to do that girl a hurt. I just mention it because, of course, you can't guarantee that it doesn't get out.

MRS. H. Not absolutely, I suppose. [*A look passes between them, which neither of them has quite sanctioned.*] There's his car. It always seems to make more noise than any other.

DAWKER. He'll kick and flounder—but you leave him to ask what you want, ma'am; don't mention this. [*He puts the deed back into his pocket.*] The Centry's no mortal good to him if he's not going to put up works; I should say he'd be glad to save what he can.

[*MRS. HILLCRIST inclines her head. FELLOWS enters Left.*]

FELLOWS. [*Apologetically*] Mr. Hornblower, ma'am; by appointment, he says.

MRS. H. Quite right, Fellows.

[*HORNBLOWER comes in, and FELLOWS goes out.*]

HORNBLOWER. [*Without salutation*] I've come to ask ye point blank what ye mean by writing me these letters. [*He takes out two letters.*] And we'll discuss it in the presence of nobody, if ye please.

MRS. H. Mr. Dawker knows all that I know, and more.

HORNBLOWER. Does he? Very well! Your second note says that my daughter-in-law has lied to me. Well, I've brought her, and what ye've got to say—if it's not just a trick to see me again—ye'll say to her face.

[He takes a step towards the window.]

MRS. H. Mr. Hornblower, you had better decide that after hearing what it is—we shall be quite ready to repeat it in her presence; but we want to do as little harm as possible.

HORNBLOWER. *[Stopping]* Oh! ye do! Well, what lies have ye been hearin'? Or what have ye made up? You and Mr. Dawker? Of course ye know there's a law of libel and slander. I'm not the man to stop at that.

MRS. H. *[Calmly]* Are you familiar with the law of divorce, Mr. Hornblower?

HORNBLOWER. *[Taken aback]* No, I'm not. That

MRS. H. Well, you know that misconduct is required. And I suppose you've heard that cases are arranged.

HORNBLOWER. I know it's all very shocking — what about it?

MRS. H. When cases are arranged, Mr. Hornblower, the man who is to be divorced often visits an hotel with a strange woman. I am extremely sorry to say that your daughter-in-law, before her marriage, was in the habit of being employed as such a woman.

HORNBLOWER. Ye dreadful creature!

DAWKER. *[Quickly]* All proved, up to the hilt!

HORNBLOWER. I don't believe a word of it. Ye're lyin' to save your skins. How dare ye tell me such monstrosities? Dawker, I'll have ye in a criminal court.

DAWKER. Rats! You saw a gent with me yesterday? Well, *he's* employed her.

HORNBLOWER. A put-up job! Conspiracy!

MRS. H. Go and get your daughter-in-law.

HORNBLOWER. *[With the first sensation of being in a net]* It's a foul shame—a lying slander!

MRS. H. If so, it's easily disproved. Go and fetch her.

HORNBLOWER. [*Seeing them unmoved*] I will. I don't believe a word of it.

MRS. H. I hope you are right.

[HORNBLOWER goes out by the French window. DAWKER slips to the door Right, opens it, and speaks to those within. MRS. HILLCRIST stands moistening her lips, and passing her handkerchief over them. HORNBLOWER returns, preceding CHLOE, strung up to hardness and defiance.

HORNBLOWER. Now then, let's have this impudent story torn to rags.

CHLOE. What story?

HORNBLOWER. That you, my dear, were a woman—it's too shockin'—I don't know how to tell ye——

CHLOE. Go on!

HORNBLOWER. Were a woman that went with men, to get them their divorce.

CHLOE. Who says that?

HORNBLOWER. That lady [*sneering*] there, and her bull-terrier here.

CHLOE. [*Facing MRS. HILLCRIST*] That's a charitable thing to say, isn't it?

MRS. H. Is it true?

CHLOE. No.

HORNBLOWER. [*Furiously*] There! I'll have ye both on your knces to her!

DAWKER. [*Opening the door Right*] Come in.

[*The FIRST STRANGER comes in. CHLOE, with a visible effort, turns to face him.*

FIRST S. How do you do, Mrs. Vane?

CHLOE. I don't know you.

FIRST S. Your memory is bad, ma'am. You knew me yesterday well enough. One day is not a long time, nor are three years.

CHLOE. Who are you?

FIRST S. Come, ma'am, come! The Custer case.

CHLOE. I don't know you, I say. [*To MRS. HILLCRIST*]
How can you be so vile?

FIRST S. Let me refresh your memory, ma'am. [*Producing a notebook.*] Just on three years ago: "Oct. 3. To fee and expenses Mrs. Vane with Mr. C——, Hotel Beaulieu, Twenty pounds. Oct. 10, Do., Twenty pounds." [*To HORNBLOWER*]
Would you like to glance at this book, sir? You'll see they're genuine entries.

[*HORNBLOWER makes a motion to do so, but checks himself and looks at CHLOE.*]

CHLOE. [*Hysterically*] It's all lies—lies!

FIRST S. Come, ma'am, we wish you no harm.

CHLOE. Take me away. I won't be treated like this.

MRS. H. [*In a low voice*] Confess.

CHLOE. Lies!

HORNBLOWER. Were ye ever called Vane?

CHLOE. No, never. [*She makes a movement towards the window, but DAWKER is in the way, and she halts.*]

FIRST S. [*Opening the door Right*] Henry.

[*The SECOND STRANGER comes in quickly. At sight of him CHLOE throws up her hands, gasps, breaks down stage Left, and stands covering her face with her hands. It is so complete a confession that HORNBLOWER stands staggered; and, taking out a coloured handkerchief, wipes his brow.*]

DAWKER. Are you convinced?

HORNBLOWER. Take those men away.

DAWKER. If you're not satisfied, we can get other evidence; plenty.

HORNBLOWER. [*Looking at CHLOE*] That's enough. Take them out. Leave me alone with her.

[*DAWKER takes them out Right.*]

[*MRS. HILLCRIST passes HORNBLOWER and goes out at the window. HORNBLOWER moves down a step or two towards CHLOE.*]

HORNBLOWER. My God!

CHLOE. [*With an outburst*] Don't tell Charlie! Don't tell Charlie!

HORNBLOWER. Chearlie! So that was your manner of life!
[CHLOE utters a moaning sound.] So that's what ye got out of
by marryin' into my family! Shame on ye, ye Godless thing!

CHLOE. Don't tell Charlie!

HORNBLOWER. And that's all ye can say for the wreck ye've
wrought. My family, my works, my future! How dared ye!

CHLOE. If you'd been me——!

HORNBLOWER. An' these Hillcrist. The skin game of it!

CHLOE. [Breathless] Father!

HORNBLOWER. Don't call me that, woman!

CHLOE. [Desperate] I'm going to have a child.

HORNBLOWER. God! Ye are!

CHLOE. Your grandchild. For the sake of it, do what these
people want; and don't tell anyone—— Don't tell Charlie!

HORNBLOWER. [Again wiping his forehead] A secret between
us. I don't know that I can keep it. It's horrible. Poor
Chearlie!

CHLOE. [Suddenly fierce] You must keep it, you shall! I
won't have him told. Don't make me desperate! I can be—I
didn't live that life for nothing.

HORNBLOWER. [Staring at her revealed in a new light] Ay;
ye look a strange, wild woman, as I see ye. And we thought
the world of ye!

CHLOE. I love Charlie; I'm faithful to him. I can't
live without him. You'll never forgive me, I know; but
Charlie——! [Stretching out her hands.

[HORNBLOWER makes a bewildered gesture with his large hands.

HORNBLOWER. I'm all at sea here. Go out to the car
and wait for me. [CHLOE passes him and goes out, Left.]

[Muttering to himself.] So I'm down! Me enemies put their
heels upon me head! Ah! but we'll see yet!

[He goes up to the window and beckons towards the Right.]

[MRS. HILLCRIST comes in.] What d'ye want for this secret?

MRS. H. Nothing.

HORNBLOWER. Indeed! Wonderful!—the trouble ye've
taken for—nothing.

MRS. H. If you harm us we shall harm you. Any use whatever of the Centry——

HORNBLOWER. For which ye made me pay nine thousand five hundred pounds.

MRS. H. We will buy it from you.

HORNBLOWER. At what price?

MRS. H. The Centry at the price Miss Mullins would have taken at first, and Longmeadow at the price you gave us—four thousand five hundred altogether.

HORNBLOWER. A fine price, and me six thousand out of pocket. Na, no! I'll keep it and hold it over ye. Ye daren't tell this secret so long as I've got it.

MRS. H. No, Mr. Hornblower. On second thoughts, you *must* sell. You broke your word over the Jackmans. We can't trust you. We would rather have our place here ruined at once, than leave you the power to ruin it as and when you like. You will sell us the Centry and Longmeadow now, or you know what will happen.

HORNBLOWER. [*Writhing*] I'll not. It's blackmail.

MRS. H. Very well then! Go your own way and we'll go ours. There is no witness to this conversation.

HORNBLOWER. [*Venomously*] By heaven, ye're a clever woman. Will ye swear by Almighty God that you and your family, and that agent of yours, won't breathe a word of this shockin' thing to mortal soul.

MRS. H. Yes, if you sell.

HORNBLOWER. Where's Dawker?

MRS. H. [*Going to the door, Right*] Mr. Dawker!

[*DAWKER comes in.*]

HORNBLOWER. I suppose ye've got your iniquity ready. [*DAWKER grins and produces the document.*] It's mighty near conspiracy, this. Have ye got a Testament?

MRS. H. My word will be enough, Mr. Hornblower.

HORNBLOWER. Ye'll pardon me—I can't make it solemn enough for you.

MRS. H. Very well; here is a Bible. [*She takes a small Bible from the bookshelf.*]

DAWKER. [*Spreading document on bureau*] This is a short conveyance of the Centry and Longmeadow—recites sale to you by Miss Mullins of the first, John Hillcrist of the second, and whereas you have agreed for the sale to said John Hillcrist, for the sum of four thousand five hundred pounds, in consideration of the said sum, receipt whereof you hereby acknowledge, you do convey all that, etc. Sign here. I'll witness.

HORNBLOWER. [*To MRS. HILLCRIST*] Take that Book in your hand, and swear first. I swear by Almighty God never to breathe a word of what I know concerning Chloe Hornblower to any living soul.

MRS. H. No, Mr. Hornblower; you will please sign first. *We are not in the habit of breaking our words.* [HORNBLOWER, *after a furious look at them, seizes a pen, runs his eye again over the deed, and signs, DAWKER witnessing.*] To that oath, Mr. Hornblower, we shall add the words, "So long as the Hornblower family do us no harm."

HORNBLOWER. [*With a snarl*] Take it in your hands, both of ye, and together swear.

MRS. H. [*Taking the Book*] I swear that I will breathe no word of what I know concerning Chloe Hornblower to any living soul, so long as the Hornblower family do us no harm.

DAWKER. I swear that too.

MRS. H. I engage for my husband.

HORNBLOWER. Where are those two fellows?

DAWKER. Gone. It's no business of theirs.

HORNBLOWER. It's no business of any of ye what has happened to a woman in the past. Ye know that. Good-day! [*He gives them a deadly look, and goes out, Left, followed by DAWKER.*]

MRS. H. [*With her hand on the Deed*] Safe!

[*HILLCRIST enters at the French window, followed by JILL.*] [*Holding up the Deed.*] Look! He's just gone! I told you it was only necessary to use the threat. He caved in and signed this; we are sworn to say nothing. We've beaten him.

[*HILLCRIST studies the Deed.*]

JILL. [*Awed*] We saw Chloe in the car. How did she take it, mother?

MRS. H. Denied, then broke down when she saw our witnesses. I'm glad you were not here, Jack.

JILL. [*Suddenly*] I shall go and see her.

MRS. H. Jill, you will *not*; you don't know what she's done.

JILL. I shall. She must be in an awful state.

HILLCRIST. My dear, you can do her no good.

JILL. I think I can, Dodo.

MRS. H. You don't understand human nature. We're enemies for life with those people. You're a little donkey if you think anything else.

JILL. I'm going, all the same.

MRS. H. Jack, forbid her.

HILLCRIST. [*Lifting an eyebrow*] Jill, be reasonable.

JILL. Suppose I'd taken a knock like that, Dodo, I'd be glad of friendliness from someone.

MRS. H. You never *could* take a knock like *that*.

JILL. You don't know what you can do till you try, mother.

HILLCRIST. Let her go, Amy. I'm sorry for that young woman.

MRS. H. You'd be sorry for a man who picked your pocket, I believe.

HILLCRIST. I certainly should! Deuced little he'd get out of it, when I've paid for the Centry.

MRS. H. [*Bitterly*] Much gratitude I get for saving you both our home!

JILL. [*Disarmed*] Oh! Mother, we *are* grateful. Dodo, show your gratitude.

HILLCRIST. Well, my dear, it's an intense relief. I'm not good at showing my feelings, as you know. What d'you want me to do? Stand on one leg and crow?

JILL. Yes, Dodo, yes! Mother, hold him while I—[*Suddenly she stops, and all the fun goes out of her.*] No! I can't—I can't help thinking of her.

The curtain falls for a minute.

SCENE II

EVENING

When it rises again, the room is empty and dark, save for moonlight coming in through the French window, which is open.

The figure of CHLOE, in a black cloak, appears outside in the moonlight; she peers in, moves past, comes back, hesitatingly enters. The cloak, fallen back, reveals a white evening-dress; and that magpie figure stands poised watchfully in the dim light, then flaps unhappily Left and Right, as if she could not keep still. Suddenly she stands listening.

ROLF'S VOICE. [Outside] Chloe! Chloe! [He appears.

CHLOE. [Going to the window] What are you doing here?

ROLF. What are you? I only followed you.

CHLOE. Go away!

ROLF. What's the matter? Tell me!

CHLOE. Go away, and don't say anything. Oh! The roses! [She has put her nose into some roses in a bowl on a big stand close to the window.] Don't they smell lovely?

ROLF. What did Jill want this afternoon?

CHLOE. I'll tell you nothing. Go away!

ROLF. I don't like leaving you here in this state.

CHLOE. What state? I'm all right. Wait for me down in the drive, if you want to.

[ROLF starts to go, stops, looks at her, and does go.

[CHLOE, with a little moaning sound, flutters again, magpie-like, up and down, then stands by the window listening. Voices are heard, Left. She darts out of the window and away to the Right, as HILLCRIST and JILL come in. They have turned up the electric light, and come down in front of the fireplace, where HILLCRIST sits in an armchair, and JILL on the arm of it. They are in undress evening attire.

HILLCRIST. Now, tell me.

JILL. There isn't much, Dodo. I was in an awful funk

for fear I should meet any of the others, and of course I did meet Rolf, but I told him some lie, and he took me to her room—boudoir, they call it—isn't boudoir a "dug-out" word?

HILLCRIST. [*Meditatively*] The sulking room. Well?

JILL. She was sitting like this. [*She buries her chin in her hands, with her elbows on her knees.*] And she said in a sort of fierce way: "What do you want?" And I said: "I'm awfully sorry, but I thought you might like it."

HILLCRIST. Well?

JILL. She looked at me hard, and said: "I suppose you know all about it." And I said: "Only vaguely," because of course I don't. And she said: "Well, it was decent of you to come." Dodo, she looks like a lost soul. What has she done?

HILLCRIST. She committed her real crime when she married young Hornblower without telling him. She came out of a certain world to do it.

JILL. Oh! [*Staring in front of her.*] Is it very awful in that world, Dodo?

HILLCRIST. [*Uneasy*] I don't know, Jill. Some can stand it, I suppose; some can't. I don't know which sort she is.

JILL. One thing I'm sure of: she's awfully fond of Chearlie.

HILLCRIST. That's bad; that's very bad.

JILL. And she's frightened, horribly. I think she's desperate.

HILLCRIST. Women like that are pretty tough, Jill; don't judge her too much by your own feelings.

JILL. No; only—— Oh! it was beastly; and of course I dried up.

HILLCRIST. [*Feelingly*] H'm! One always does. But perhaps it was as well; you'd have been blundering in a dark passage.

JILL. I just said: "Father and I feel awfully sorry; if there's anything we can do——"

HILLCRIST. That was risky, Jill.

JILL. [*Disconsolately*] I had to say something. I'm glad I went, anyway. I feel more human.

HILLCRIST. We *had* to fight for our home. I should have felt like a traitor if I hadn't.

JILL. I'm not *enjoying* home to-night, Dodo.

HILLCRIST. I never could hate properly; it's a confounded nuisance.

JILL. Mother's fearfully bucked, and Dawker's simply oozing triumph. I *don't* trust him, Dodo; he's too—not pugilistic—the other one with a pug—nacious.

HILLCRIST. He is rather

JILL. I'm sure he wouldn't care tuppence if Chloe committed suicide.

HILLCRIST. [*Rising uneasily*] Nonsense! Nonsense!

JILL. I wonder if mother would.

HILLCRIST. [*Turning his face towards the window*] What's that? I thought I heard— [*Louder*] Is there anybody out there? [*No answer. JILL springs up and runs to the window.*]

JILL. You! [*She dives through to the Right, and returns, holding CHLOE's hand and drawing her forward.*] Come in! It's only us! [*To HILLCRIST*] Dodo!

HILLCRIST. [*Flustered, but making a show of courtesy*] Good-evening! Won't you sit down?

JILL. Sit down; you're all shaky.

[*She makes CHLOE sit down in the armchair, out of which they have risen, then locks the door, and closing the windows, draws the curtains hastily over them.*]

HILLCRIST. [*Awkward and expectant*] Can I do anything for you?

CHLOE. I couldn't bear it—he's coming to ask you——

HILLCRIST. Who?

CHLOE. My husband. [*She draws in her breath with a long shudder, then seems to seize her courage in her hands.*] I've got to be quick. He keeps on asking—he knows there's something.

HILLCRIST. Make your mind easy. We shan't tell him.

CHLOE. [*Appealing*] Oh! that's not enough. Can't you tell him something to put him back to thinking it's all right? I've done him such a wrong. I didn't realize till after—I thought meeting him was just a piece of wonderful good luck, after what I'd been through. I'm not such a bad

lot—not really. [*She stops from the over-quivering of her lips. JILL, standing beside the chair, strokes her shoulder. HILLCRIST stands very still, painfully biting at a finger.*] You see, my father went bankrupt, and I was in a shop till——

HILLCRIST. [*Soothingly, and to prevent disclosures*] Yes, yes; yes, yes.

CHLOE. I never gave a man away or did anything I was ashamed of—at least—I mean, I had to make my living in all sorts of ways, and then I met Charlie. [*Again she stopped from the quivering of her lips.*]

JILL. It's all right.

CHLOE. He thought I was respectable, and that was such a relief, you can't think, so—so I let him.

JILL. Dodo! It's awful!

HILLCRIST. It is!

CHLOE. And after I married him, you see, I fell in love. If I had before, perhaps I wouldn't have dared—only, I don't know—you never know, do you? When there's a straw going, you catch at it.

JILL. Of course you do.

CHLOE. And now, you see, I'm going to have a child.

JILL. [*Aghast*] Oh! *Are* you?

HILLCRIST. Good God!

CHLOE. [*Dully*] I've been on hot bricks all this month, ever since—that day here. I knew it was in the wind. What gets in the wind never gets out. [*She rises and throws out her arms.*] Never! It just blows here and there, [*Desolately*] and then blows home. [*Her voice changes to resentment.*] But I've paid for being a fool—'t isn't fun, that sort of life, I can tell you. I'm not ashamed and repentant, and all that. If it wasn't for him; I'm afraid he'll never forgive me; it's such a disgrace for him—and then, to have his child! Being fond of him, I feel it much worse than anything I ever felt, and that's saying a good bit. It is.

JILL. [*Energetically*] Look here! He simply mustn't find out.

CHLOE. That's it; but it's started, and he's bound to keep on because he knows there's something. A man isn't going to

be satisfied when there's something he suspects about his wife. Charlie wouldn't—never. He's clever, and he's jealous; and he's coming here. [*She stops, and looks round wildly, listening.*]

JILL. Dodo, what can we say to put him clean off the scent?

HILLCRIST. Anything in reason.

CHLOE. [*Catching at this straw*] You will! You see, I don't know what I'll do. I've got soft, being looked after—he does love me. And if he throws me off, I'll go under—that's all.

HILLCRIST. Have you any suggestion?

CHLOE. [*Eagerly*] The only thing is to tell him something positive, something he'll believe, that's not *too* bad—like my having been a lady clerk with those people who came here, and having been dismissed on suspicion of taking money. I could get him to believe that wasn't true.

JILL. Yes; and it isn't—that's splendid! You'd be able to put such conviction into it. Don't you think so, Dodo?

HILLCRIST. Anything I can. I'm deeply sorry.

CHLOE. Thank you. And don't say I've been here, will you? He's very suspicious. You see, he knows that his father has re-sold that land to you; that's what he can't make out—that, and my coming here this morning; he knows something's being kept from him; and he noticed that man with Dawker yesterday. And my maid's been spying on me. It's in the air. He puts two and two together. But I've told him there's nothing he need worry about; nothing that's true.

HILLCRIST. What a coil!

CHLOE. I'm very honest and careful about money. So he won't believe that about me, and the old man wants to keep it from Charlie, I know.

HILLCRIST. That does seem the best way out.

CHLOE. [*With a touch of defiance*] I'm a true wife to him.

JILL. Of course we know that.

HILLCRIST. It's all unspeakably sad. Deception's horribly against the grain—but——

CHLOE. [*Eagerly*] When I deceived him, I'd have deceived God Himself—I was so desperate. You've never been right

down in the mud. You can't understand what I've been through.

HILLCRIST. Yes, yes. I daresay I'd have done the same. I should be the last to judge—— [CHLOE covers her eyes with her hands.] There, there! Cheer up! [He puts his hand on her arm.

JILL. [To herself] Darling Dodo!

CHLOE. [Starting] There's somebody at the door. I must go; I must go. [She runs to the window and slips through the curtains. " [The handle of the door is again turned.

JILL. [Dismayed] Oh! It's locked—I forgot. [She springs to the door, unlocks and opens it, while HILLCRIST goes to the bureau and sits down.] It's all right, Fellows; I was only saying something rather important.

FELLOWS. [Coming in a step or two and closing the door behind him] Certainly, Miss. Mr. Charles 'Ornblower is in the hall. Wants to see you, sir, or Mrs. Hillcrist.

JILL. What a bore! Can you see him, Dodo?

HILLCRIST. Er—yes. I suppose so. Show him in here, Fellows.

[As FELLOWS goes out, JILL runs to the window, but has no time to do more than adjust the curtains and spring over to stand by her father, before CHARLES comes in. Though in evening clothes, he is white and dishevelled for so spruce a young man.

CHARLES. Is my wife here?

HILLCRIST. No, sir.

CHARLES. Has she been?

HILLCRIST. This morning, I believe, Jill?

JILL. Yes, she came this morning.

CHARLES. [Staring at her] I know that—now, I mean?

JILL. No. [HILLCRIST shakes his head.

CHARLES. Tell me what was said this morning.

HILLCRIST. I was not here this morning.

CHARLES. Don't try to put me off. I know too much. [To JILL] You.

JILL. Shall I, Dodo?

HILLCRIST. No; I will. Won't you sit down?

CHARLES. No. Go on.

HILLCRIST. [*Moistening his lips*] It appears, Mr. Hornblower, that my agent, Mr. Dawker—— [*CHARLES, who is breathing hard, utters a sound of anger.*]—that my agent happens to know a firm, who in old days employed your wife. I should greatly prefer not to say any more, especially as we don't believe the story.

JILL. No; we don't.

CHARLES. Go on!

HILLCRIST. [*Getting up*] Come! If I were you, I should refuse to listen to anything against my wife.

CHARLES. Go on, I tell you.

HILLCRIST. You insist! Well, they say there was some question about the accounts, and your wife left them under a cloud. As I told you, we don't believe it.

CHARLES. [*Passionately*] Liars!

[*He makes a rush for the door.*]

HILLCRIST. [*Starting*] What did you say?

JILL. [*Catching his arm*] Dodo! [*Sotto voce*] We are, you know.

CHARLES. [*Turning back to them*] Why do you tell me that lie? When I've just had the truth out of that little scoundrel! My wife's been here; she put you up to it. [*The face of CHLOE is seen transfixed between the curtains, parted by her hands.*] She—she put you up to it. Liar that she is—a living lie. For three years a living lie. [*HILLCRIST, whose face alone is turned towards the curtains, sees that listening face. His hand goes up from uncontrollable emotion.*] And hasn't now the pluck to tell me. I've done with her. I won't own a child by such a woman. [*With a little sighing sound CHLOE drops the curtain and vanishes.*]

HILLCRIST. For God's sake, man, think of what you're saying. She's in great distress.

CHARLES. And what am I?

JILL. She loves you, you know.

CHARLES. Pretty love! That scoundrel Dawker told me—told me—— Horrible! Horrible!

HILLCRIST. I deeply regret that our quarrel should have brought this about.

CHARLES. [*With intense bitterness*] Yes, you've smashed my life.

[*Unseen by them, MRS. HILLCRIST has entered and stands by the door, Left.*

MRS. H. Would you have wished to live on in ignorance?
[*They all turn to look at her.*

CHARLES. [*With a writhing movement*] I don't know. But—you—you did it.

MRS. H. You shouldn't have attacked us.

CHARLES. What did we do to you—compared with this?

MRS. H. All you could.

HILLCRIST. Enough, enough! What can we do to help you?

CHARLES. Tell me where my wife is.

[*JILL draws the curtains apart—the window is open—JILL looks out. They wait in silence.*

JILL. We don't know.

CHARLES. Then she *was* here?

HILLCRIST. Yes, sir; and she heard you.

CHARLES. All the better if she did. She knows how I feel.

HILLCRIST. Brace up; be gentle with her.

CHARLES. Gentle? A woman who—who——

HILLCRIST. A most unhappy creature. Come!

CHARLES. Damn your sympathy! [*He goes out into the moonlight, passing away Left.*

JILL. Dodo, we ought to look for her; I'm awfully afraid.

HILLCRIST. I saw her there—listening. With child! Who knows where things end when they once begin? To the gravel pit, Jill: I'll go to the pond. No, we'll go together. [*They go out.*

[*MRS. HILLCRIST comes down to the fireplace, rings the bell and stands there, thinking. FELLOWS enters.*

MRS. H. I want someone to go down to Mr. Dawker's.

FELLOWS. Mr. Dawker is here, ma'am, waitin' to see you.

MRS. H. Ask him to come in. Oh! and, Fellows, you can tell the Jackmans that they can go back to their cottage.

FELLOWS. Very good, ma'am. *[He goes out.]*

[MRS. HILLCRIST searches at the bureau, finds and takes out the deed. DAWKER comes in; he has the appearance of a man whose temper has been badly ruffled.]

MRS. H. Charles Hornblower—how did it happen?

DAWKER. He came to me. I said I knew nothing. He wouldn't take it; went for me, abused me up hill and down dale; said he knew everything, and then he began to threaten me. Well, I lost my temper, and I told him.

MRS. H. That's very serious, Dawker, after our promise. My husband is most upset.

DAWKER. *[Sullenly]* It's not my fault, ma'am; he shouldn't have threatened and goaded me on. Besides, it's got out that there's a scandal; common talk in the village—not the facts, but quite enough to cook their goose here. They'll have to go. Better have done with it, anyway, than have enemies at your door.

MRS. H. Perhaps; but—— Oh! Dawker, take charge of this. *[She hands him the deed.]* These people are desperate—and—I'm not sure of my husband when his feelings are worked on. *[The sound of a car stopping.]*

DAWKER. *[At the window, looking to the Left]* Hornblower's, I think. Yes, he's getting out.

MRS. H. *[Bracing herself]* You'd better wait, then.

DAWKER. He mustn't give me any of his sauce; I've had enough.

[The door is opened and HORNBLOWER enters, pressing so on the heels of FELLOWS that the announcement of his name is lost.]

HORNBLOWER. Give me that deed! Ye got it out of me by false pretences and treachery. Ye swore that nothing should be heard of this. Why! me own servants know!

MRS. H. That has nothing to do with us. Your son came and wrenched the knowledge out of Mr. Dawker by abuse and threats; that is all. You will kindly behave yourself here, or I shall ask that you be shown out.

HORNBLOWER. Give me that deed, I say! *[He suddenly turns*

on DAWKER.] Ye little ruffian, I see it in your pocket. [*The end indeed is projecting from DAWKER's breast pocket.*]

DAWKER. [*Seeing red*] Now, look 'ere, 'Ornblower, I stood a deal from your son, and I'll stand no more.

HORNBLOWER. [*To MRS. HILLCRIST*] I'll ruin your place yet! [*To DAWKER*] Ye give me that deed, or I'll throttle you.

[*He closes on DAWKER, and makes a snatch at the deed. DAWKER springs at him, and the two stand swaying, trying for a grip at each other's throats. MRS. HILLCRIST tries to cross and reach the bell, but is shut off by their swaying struggle.*]

[*Suddenly ROLF appears in the window, looks wildly at the struggle, and seizes DAWKER's hands, which have reached HORNBLOWER's throat. JILL, who is following, rushes up to him and clutches his arm.*]

JILL. Rolf! All of you! Stop! Look! [*DAWKER's hand relaxes, and he is swung round. HORNBLOWER staggers and recovers himself, gasping for breath. All turn to the window, outside which in the moonlight HILLCRIST and CHARLES HORNBLOWER have CHLOE's motionless body in their arms.*] In the gravel pit. She's just breathing; that's all.

MRS. H. Bring her in. The brandy, Jill!

HORNBLOWER. No. Take her to the car. Stand back, young woman! I want no help from any of ye. Rolf—Chearlie—take her up. [*They lift and bear her away, Left. JILL follows.*] Hillcrist, ye've got me beaten and disgraced hereabouts, ye've destroyed my son's married life, and ye've killed my grandchild. I'm not staying in this cursed spot, but if ever I can do you or yours a hurt, I will.

DAWKER. [*Muttering*] That's right. Squeal and threaten. You began it.

HILLCRIST. Dawker, have the goodness! Hornblower, in the presence of what may be death, with all my heart I'm sorry.

HORNBLOWER. Ye hypocrite! [*He passes them with a certain dignity, and goes out at the window, following to his car.*]

[*HILLCRIST, who has stood for a moment stock-still, goes slowly forward and sits in his swivel chair.*]

MRS. H. Dawker, please tell Fellows to telephone to Dr. Robinson to go round to the Hornblowers *at once*. [DAWKER, *fingering the deed, and with a noise that sounds like "The cur!" goes out, Left.*] [At the fireplace.] Jack! Do you blame me?

HILLCRIST. [Motionless] No.

MRS. H. Or Dawker? He's done his best.

HILLCRIST. No.

MRS. H. [Approaching] What is it?

HILLCRIST. Hypocrite!

[JILL comes running in at the window.

JILL. Dodo, she's moved; she's spoken. It may not be so bad.

HILLCRIST. Thank God for that! [FELLOWS enters, Left.

FELLOWS. The Jackmans, ma'am.

HILLCRIST. Who? What's this?

[The JACKMANS have entered, standing close to the door.

MRS. J. We're so glad we can go back, sir—ma'am, we just wanted to thank you. [There is a silence, they see that they are not welcome.] Thank you kindly, sir. Good-night, ma'am.

[They shuffle out.

HILLCRIST. I'd forgotten their existence. [He gets up.] What is it that gets loose when you begin a fight, and makes you what you think you're not? What blinding evil! Begin as you may, it ends in this—skin game! Skin game!

JILL. [Rushing to him] It's not you, Dodo; it's not you, beloved Dodo.

HILLCRIST. It is me. For I am, or should be, master in this house.

MRS. H. I don't understand.

HILLCRIST. When we began this fight, we had clean hands—are they clean now? What's gentility worth if it can't stand fire?

The curtain falls.

LOYALTIES

CAST OF THE ORIGINAL PRODUCTION AT
THE ST. MARTIN'S THEATRE, LONDON,
MARCH 8, 1922

CHARLES WINSOR	<i>Edmond Breon</i>
LADY ADELA	<i>Dorothy Massingham</i>
FERDINAND DE LEVIS	<i>Ernest Milton</i>
TREASURE	<i>Gilbert Ritchie</i>
GENERAL CANYNGE	<i>Dawson Milward</i>
MARGARET ORME	<i>Cathleen Nesbitt</i>
CAPTAIN RONALD DANCY	<i>Eric Maturin</i>
MABEL DANCY	<i>Meggie Albanesi</i>
INSPECTOR DEDE	<i>Griffith Humphreys</i>
ROBERT	<i>Clifford Mollison</i>
A CONSTABLE	<i>Ian Hunter</i>
MAJOR COLFORD	<i>Malcolm Keen</i>
AUGUSTUS BORRING	<i>J. H. Roberts</i>
LORD ST. ERTH	<i>Ben Field</i>
A CLUB FOOTMAN	<i>Ian Hunter</i>
EDWARD GRAVITER	<i>Clifford Mollison</i>
A YOUNG CLERK	<i>Ian Hunter</i>
GILMAN	<i>Ben Field</i>
JACOB TWISDEN	<i>J. H. Roberts</i>
RICARDOS	<i>Griffith Humphreys</i>

ACT I

SCENE I

The dressing-room of CHARLES WINSOR, owner of Meldon Court, near Newmarket; about eleven-thirty at night. The room has pale grey walls, unadorned; the curtains are drawn over a window, Back Left Centre. A bed lies along the wall, Left. An open door, Right Back, leads into LADY ADELA'S bedroom; a door, Right Forward, into a long corridor, on to which abut rooms in a row, the whole length of the house's left wing. WINSOR'S dressing-table, with a light over it, is Stage Right of the curtained window. Pyjamas are laid out on the bed, which is turned back. Slippers are handy, and all the usual gear of a well-appointed bed-dressing-room. CHARLES WINSOR, a tall, fair, good-looking man about thirty-eight, is taking off a smoking jacket.

WINSOR. Hallo! Adela!

V. of LADY A. [*From her bedroom*] Hallo!

WINSOR. In bed?

V. of LADY A. No. [*She appears in the doorway in undergarment and a wrapper. She, too, is fair, about thirty-five, rather delicious, and suggestive of porcelain.*]

WINSOR. Win at Bridge?

LADY A. No fear.

WINSOR. Who did?

LADY A. Lord St. Erth and Ferdy De Levis.

WINSOR. That young man has too much luck—the young bounder won two races to-day; and he's as rich as Cræsus.

LADY A. Oh! Charlie, he did look so exactly as if he'd sold me a carpet when I was paying him.

WINSOR. [*Changing into slippers*] His father did sell carpets, wholesale, in the City.

LADY A. Really? And you say I haven't intuition! [*With a finger on her lips*] Morison's in there.

WINSOR. [*Motioning towards the door, which she shuts*] Ronny Dancy took a tenner off him, anyway, before dinner.

LADY A. No! How?

WINSOR. Standing jump on to a bookcase four feet high. De Levis had to pay up, and sneered at him for making money by parlour tricks. That young Jew gets himself disliked.

LADY A. Aren't you rather prejudiced?

WINSOR. Not a bit. I like Jews. That's not against him—rather the contrary these days. But he pushes himself. The General tells me he's deathly keen to get into the Jockey Club. [*Taking off his tie.*] It's amusing to see him trying to get round old St. Erth.

LADY A. If Lord St. Erth and General Canynge backed him he'd get in if he *did* sell carpets!

WINSOR. He's got some pretty good horses. [*Taking off his waistcoat.*] Ronny Dancy's on his bones again, I'm afraid. He had a bad day. When a chap takes to doing parlour stunts for a bet—it's a sure sign. What made him chuck the Army?

LADY A. He says it's too dull, now there's no fighting.

WINSOR. Well, he can't exist on backing losers.

LADY A. Isn't it just like him to get married now? He really is the most reckless person.

WINSOR. Yes. He's a queer chap. I've always liked him, but I've never quite made him out. What do you think of his wife?

LADY A. Nice child; awfully gone on him.

WINSOR. Is *he*?

LADY A. Quite indecently—both of them. [*Nodding towards the wall, Left.*] They're next door.

WINSOR. Who's beyond them?

LADY A. De Levis; and Margaret Orme at the end. Charlie, do you realize that the bathroom out there has to wash those four?

WINSOR. I know.

LADY A. Your grandfather was crazy when he built this wing; six rooms in a row with balconies like an hotel, and only one bath—if we hadn't put ours in.

WINSOR. [*Looking at his watch*] Half-past eleven. [*Yawns.*] Newmarket always makes me sleepy. You're keeping Morison up. [*LADY ADELA goes to the door, blowing a kiss.*] [*CHARLES goes up to his dressing-table and begins to brush his hair, sprinkling on essence. There is a knock on the corridor door.*] Come in. [*DE LEVIS enters, clad in pyjamas and flowered dressing-gown. He is a dark, good-looking, rather Eastern young man. His face is long and disturbed.*] Hallo! De Levis! Anything I can do for you?

DE LEVIS. [*In a voice whose faint exoticism is broken by a vexed excitement*] I say, I'm awfully sorry, Winsor, but I thought I'd better tell you at once. I've just had—er—rather a lot of money stolen.

WINSOR. What! [*There is something of outrage in his tone and glance, as who should say: "In my house?"*] How do you mean *stolen*?

DE LEVIS. I put it under my pillow and went to have a bath; when I came back it was gone.

WINSOR. Good Lord! How much?

DE LEVIS. Nearly a thousand—nine hundred and seventy, I think.

WINSOR. Phew! [*Again the faint tone of outrage, that a man should have so much money about him.*]

DE LEVIS. I sold my Rosemary filly to-day on the course to Kentman the bookie, and he paid me in notes.

WINSOR. What? That weed Dancy gave you in the Spring?

DE LEVIS. Yes. But I tried her pretty high the other day; and she's in the Cambridgeshire. I was only out of my room a quarter of an hour, and I locked my door.

WINSOR. [*Again outraged*] You locked—

DE LEVIS. [*Not seeing the fine shade*] Yes, and had the key here. [*He taps his pocket.*] Look here! [*He holds out a pocket-book.*] It's been stuffed with my shaving papers.

WINSOR. [*Between feeling that such things don't happen, and a sense that he will have to clear it up*] This is damned awkward, De Levis.

DE LEVIS. [*With steel in his voice*] Yes. I should like it back.

WINSOR. Have you got the number of the notes?

DE LEVIS. No.

WINSOR. What were they?

DE LEVIS. One hundred, three fifties, and the rest tens and fives.

WINSOR. What d'you want me to do?

DE LEVIS. Unless there's anybody you think——

WINSOR. [*Eyeing him*] Is it likely?

DE LEVIS. Then I think the police ought to see my room. It's a lot of money.

WINSOR. Good Lord! We're not in Town; there'll be nobody nearer than Newmarket at this time of night—four miles.

[*The door from the bedroom is suddenly opened and LADY ADELA appears. She has on a lace cap over her finished hair, and the wrapper.*]

LADY A. [*Closing the door*] What is it? Are you ill, Mr. De Levis?

WINSOR. Worse; he's had a lot of money stolen. Nearly a thousand pounds.

LADY A. Gracious! Where?

DE LEVIS. From under my pillow, Lady Adela—my door was locked—I was in the bathroom.

LADY A. But how fearfully thrilling!

WINSOR. Thrilling! What's to be done? He wants it back.

LADY A. Of course! [*With sudden realization*] Oh! But—— Oh! it's quite too unpleasant!

WINSOR. Yes! What am I to do? Fetch the servants out of their rooms? Search the grounds? It'll make the devil of a scandal.

DE LEVIS. Who's next to me?

LADY A. [*Coldly*] Oh! Mr. De Levis!

WINSOR. Next to you? The Dancys on this side, and Miss Orme on the other. What's that to do with it?

DE LEVIS. They may have heard something.

WINSOR. Let's get them. But Dancy was downstairs when I came up. Get Morison, Adela! No. Look here! When *was* this exactly? Let's have as many alibis as we can.

DE LEVIS. Within the last twenty minutes, certainly.

WINSOR. How long has Morison been up with you?

LADY A. I came up at eleven, and rang for her at once.

WINSOR. [*Looking at his watch*] Half an hour. Then she's all right. Send her for Margaret and the Dancys—there's nobody else in this wing. No; send her to bed. We don't want gossip. D'you mind going yourself, Adela?

LADY A. Consult General Canynge, Charlie.

WINSOR. Right. Could you get him too? D'you really want the police, De Levis?

DE LEVIS. [*Stung by the faint contempt in his tone of voice*] Yes, I do.

WINSOR. Then, look here, dear! Slip into my study and telephone to the police at Newmarket. There'll be somebody there; they're sure to have drunks. I'll have Treisure up, and speak to him. [*He rings the bell.*]

[*LADY ADELA goes out into her room and closes the door.*]

WINSOR. Look here, De Levis! This isn't an hotel. It's the sort of thing that doesn't happen in a decent house. Are you sure you're not mistaken, and didn't have them stolen on the course?

DE LEVIS. Absolutely. I counted them just before putting them under my pillow; then I locked the door and had the key here. There's only one door, you know.

WINSOR. How was your window?

DE LEVIS. Open.

WINSOR. [*Drawing back the curtains of his own window*] You've got a balcony like this. Any sign of a ladder or anything?

DE LEVIS. No.

WINSOR. It must have been done from the window, unless

someone had a skeleton key. Who knew you'd got that money? Where did Kentman pay you?

DE LEVIS. Just round the corner in the further paddock.

WINSOR. Anybody about?

DE LEVIS. Oh, yes!

WINSOR. Suspicious?

DE LEVIS. I didn't notice anything.

WINSOR. You must have been marked down and followed here.

DE LEVIS. How would they know my room?

WINSOR. Might have got it somehow. [*A knock from the corridor.*] Come in.

[TREASURE, the Butler, appears, a silent, grave man of almost supernatural conformity. DE LEVIS gives him a quick, hard look, noted and resented by WINSOR.]

TREASURE. [*To WINSOR*] Yes, sir?

WINSOR. Who valets Mr. De Levis?

TREASURE. Robert, sir.

WINSOR. When was he up last?

TREASURE. In the ordinary course of things, about ten o'clock, sir.

WINSOR. When did he go to bed?

TREASURE. I dismissed at eleven.

WINSOR. But did he go?

TREASURE. To the best of my knowledge. Is there anything I can do, sir?

WINSOR. [*Disregarding a sign from DE LEVIS*] Look here, Treasure, Mr. De Levis has had a large sum of money taken from his bedroom within the last half-hour.

TREASURE. Indeed, sir!

WINSOR. Robert's quite all right, isn't he?

TREASURE. He is, sir.

DE LEVIS. How do you know?

[TREASURE'S eyes rest on DE LEVIS.]

TREASURE. I am a pretty good judge of character, sir, if you'll excuse me.

WINSOR. Look here, De Levis, eighty or ninety notes must have been pretty bulky. You didn't have them on you at dinner?

DE LEVIS. No.

WINSOR. Where did you put them?

DE LEVIS. In a boot, and the boot in my suit-case, and locked it. [TREISURE smiles faintly.]

WINSOR. [*Again slightly outraged by such precautions in his house*] And you found it locked—and took them from there to put under your pillow?

DE LEVIS. Yes.

WINSOR. Run your mind over things, Treisure—has any stranger been about?

TREISURE. No, sir.

WINSOR. This seems to have happened between 11.15 and 11.30. Is that right? [DE LEVIS nods.] Any noise—anything outside—anything suspicious anywhere?

TREISURE. [*Running his mind—very still*] No, sir.

WINSOR. What time did you shut up?

TREISURE. I should say about eleven-fifteen, sir. As soon as Major Colford and Captain Dancy had finished billiards. What was Mr. De Levis doing out of his room, if I may ask, sir?

WINSOR. Having a bath; with his room locked and the key in his pocket.

TREISURE. Thank you, sir.

DE LEVIS. [*Conscious of indefinable suspicion*] Damn it! What do you mean? I was.

TREISURE. I beg your pardon, sir.

WINSOR. [*Concealing a smile*] Look here, Treisure, it's infernally awkward for everybody.

TREISURE. It is, sir.

WINSOR. What do you suggest?

TREISURE. The proper thing, sir, I suppose, would be a cordon and a complete search—in our interests.

WINSOR. I entirely refuse to suspect anybody.

TREISURE. But if Mr. De Levis feels otherwise, sir?

DE LEVIS. [*Stammering*] I? All I know is—the money was there, and it's gone.

WINSOR. [*Compunctious*] Quite! It's pretty sickening for you. But so it is for anybody else. However, we must do our best to get it back for you. [*A knock on the door.*]

WINSOR. Hallo! [*TREISURE opens the door, and GENERAL CANYNGE enters.*] Oh! It's you, General. Come in. Adela's told you?

[*GENERAL CANYNGE nods. He is a slim man of about sixty, very well preserved, intensely neat and self-contained, and still in evening dress. His eyelids droop slightly, but his eyes are keen and his expression astute.*]

WINSOR. Well, General, what's the first move?

CANYNGE. [*Lifting his eyebrows*] Mr. De Levis presses the matter?

DE LEVIS. [*Flicked again*] Unless you think it's too plebeian of me, General Canynge—a thousand pounds.

CANYNGE. [*Dryly*] Just so! Then we must wait for the police, Winsor. Lady Adela has got through to them. What height are these rooms from the ground, Treisure?

TREISURE. Twenty-three feet from the terrace, sir.

CANYNGE. Any ladders near?

TREISURE. One in the stables, sir, very heavy. No others within three hundred yards.

CANYNGE. Just slip down, and see whether that's been moved.

TREISURE. Very good, General. [*He goes out.*]

DE LEVIS. [*Uneasily*] Of course, he—I suppose you——

WINSOR. We do.

CANYNGE. You had better leave this in our hands, De Levis.

DE LEVIS. Certainly; only, the way he——

WINSOR. [*Curtly*] Treisure has been here since he was a boy. I should as soon suspect myself.

DE LEVIS. [*Looking from one to the other—with sudden anger*] You seem to think——! What was I to do? Take it lying down and let whoever it is get clear off? I suppose it's natural

to want my money back? [CANYNGE looks at his nails; WINSOR out of the window.

WINSOR. [Turning] Of course, De Levis!

DE LEVIS. [Sullenly] Well, I'll go to my room. When the police come, perhaps you'll let me know. [He goes out.

WINSOR. Phew! Did you ever see such a dressing-gown?

[The door is opened. LADY ADELA and MARGARET ORME come in. The latter is a vivid young lady of about twenty-five in a vivid wrapper; she is smoking a cigarette.

LADY A. I've told the Dancys—she was in bed. And I got through to Newmarket, Charles, and Inspector Dede is coming like the wind on a motor cycle.

MARGARET. Did he say, "like the wind," Adela? He must have imagination. Isn't this gorgeous? Poor little Ferdy!

WINSOR. [Vexed] You might take it seriously, Margaret; it's pretty beastly for us all. What time did you come up?

MARGARET. I came up with Adela. Am I suspected, Charles? How thrilling!

WINSOR. Did you hear anything?

MARGARET. Only little Ferdy splashing.

WINSOR. And saw nothing?

MARGARET. Not even that, alas!

LADY A. [With a finger held up] Leste! Un peu leste! Oh! Here are the Dancys. Come in, you two!

[MABEL and RONALD DANCY enter. She is a pretty young woman with bobbed hair, fortunately, for she has just got out of bed, and is in her nightgown and a wrapper. DANCY is in his smoking jacket. He has a pale, determined face with high cheekbones, small, deep-set dark eyes, reddish crisp hair, and looks like a horseman.

WINSOR. Awfully sorry to disturb you, Mrs. Dancy; but I suppose you and Ronny haven't heard anything. De Levis's room is just beyond Ronny's dressing-room, you know.

MABEL. I've been asleep nearly half an hour, and Ronny's only just come up.

CANYNGE. Did you happen to look out of your window, Mrs. Dancy?

MABEL. Yes. I stood there quite five minutes.

CANYNGE. When?

MABEL. Just about eleven, I should think. It was raining hard then.

CANYNGE. Yes, it's just stopped. You saw nothing?

MABEL. No.

DANCY. What time does he say the money was taken?

WINSOR. Between the quarter and half past. He'd locked his door and had the key with him.

MARGARET. How quaint! Just like an hotel. Does he put his boots out?

LADY A. Don't be so naughty, Meg.

CANYNGE. When exactly did *you* come up, Dancy?

DANCY. About ten minutes ago. I'd only just got into my dressing-room before Lady Adela came. I've been writing letters in the hall since Colford and I finished billiards.

CANYNGE. You weren't up for anything in between?

DANCY. No.

MARGARET. The mystery of the grey room.

DANCY. Oughtn't the grounds to be searched for foot-marks?

CANYNGE. That's for the police.

DANCY. The deuce! Are they coming?

CANYNGE. Directly. [*A knock.*] Yes? [*TREASURE enters.*] Well?

TREASURE. The ladder has not been moved, General. There isn't a sign.

WINSOR. All right. Get Robert up, but don't say anything to him. By the way, we're expecting the police.

TREASURE. I trust they will not find a mare's-nest, sir, if I may say so. [*He goes.*]

WINSOR. De Levis has got wrong with Treasure. [*Suddenly*] But I say, what would any of us have done if *we'd* been in his shoes?

MARGARET. A thousand pounds? I can't even conceive having it.

DANCY. We probably shouldn't have found it out.

LADY A. No—but if we had.

DANCY. Come to you—as he did.

WINSOR. Yes; but there's a way of doing things.

CANYNGE. We shouldn't have wanted the police.

MARGARET. No. That's it. The hotel touch.

LADY A. Poor young man; I think we're rather hard on him.

WINSOR. He sold that weed you gave him, Dancy, to Kentman the bookie, and these were the proceeds.

DANCY. Oh!

WINSOR. He'd tried her high, he said.

DANCY. [*Grimly*] He would.

MABEL. Oh! Ronny, what bad luck!

WINSOR. He must have been followed here. [*At the window.*] After rain like that, there ought to be footmarks.

[*The splutter of a motor cycle is heard.*]

MARGARET. Here's the wind!

WINSOR. What's the move now, General?

CANYNGE. You and I had better see the Inspector in De Levis's room, Winsor. [*To the others*] If you'll all be handy, in case he wants to put questions for himself.

MARGARET. I hope he'll want me; it's just too thrilling.

DANCY. I hope he won't want me; I'm dog-tired. Come on, Mabel. [*He puts his arm in his wife's.*]

CANYNGE. Just a minute, Charles. [*He draws close to WINSOR as the others are departing to their rooms.*]

WINSOR. Yes, General?

CANYNGE. We must be careful with this Inspector fellow. If he pitches hastily on somebody in the house it'll be very disagreeable.

WINSOR. By Jove! It *will*.

CANYNGE. We don't want to rouse any ridiculous suspicion.

WINSOR. Quite. [*A knock.*] Come in. [*TREASURE enters.*]

TREASURE. Inspector Dede, sir.

WINSOR. Show him in.

TREASURE. Robert is in readiness, sir; but I could swear he knows nothing about it.

WINSOR. All right.

[TREASURE *re-opens the door, and says*: "Come in, please."
The INSPECTOR *enters, blue, formal, moustachioed, with a peaked cap in his hand.*

WINSOR. Good evening, Inspector. Sorry to have brought you out at this time of night.

INSPECTOR. Good evenin', sir. Mr. Winsor? You're the owner here, I think?

WINSOR. Yes. General Canynge.

INSPECTOR. Good evenin', General. I understand, a large sum of money?

WINSOR. Yes. Shall we go straight to the room it was taken from? One of my guests, Mr. De Levis. It's the third room on the left.

CANYNGE. We've not been in there yet, Inspector; in fact, we've done nothing, except to find out that the stable ladder has not been moved. We haven't even searched the grounds.

INSPECTOR. Right, sir. I've brought a man with me.

[*They go out.*

The curtain falls. An interval of a minute.

SCENE II *

The bedroom of DE LEVIS is the same in shape as WINSOR's dressing-room, except that there is only one door—to the corridor. The furniture, however, is differently arranged; a small four-poster bedstead stands against the wall, Right Back, jutting into the room. A chair, on which DE LEVIS's clothes are thrown, stands at its foot. There is a dressing-table against the wall to the left of the open windows, where the curtains are drawn back

* The same set is used for this Scene, with the different arrangement of furniture, as specified.

and a stone balcony is seen. Against the wall to the right of the window is a chest of drawers, and a washstand is against the wall, Left. On a small table to the right of the bed an electric reading-lamp is turned up, and there is a light over the dressing-table. The INSPECTOR is standing plumb centre looking at the bed, and DE LEVIS by the back of the chair at the foot of the bed. WINSOR and CANYNGE are close to the door, Right Forward.

INSPECTOR. [*Finishing a note*] Now, sir, if this is the room as you left it for your bath, just show us exactly what you did after takin' the pocket-book from the suit-case. Where was that, by the way?

DE LEVIS. [*Pointing*] Where it is now—under the dressing-table.

[He comes forward to the front of the chair, opens the pocket-book, goes through the pretence of counting his shaving papers, closes the pocket-book, takes it to the head of the bed and slips it under the pillow. Makes the motion of taking up his pyjamas, crosses below the INSPECTOR to the washstand, takes up a bath sponge, crosses to the door, takes out the key, opens the door.]

INSPECTOR. [*Writing*] We now have the room as it was when the theft was committed. Reconstruct accordin' to 'uman nature, gentlemen—assumin' the thief to be in the room, what would he try first?—the clothes, the dressin'-table, the suit-case, the chest of drawers, and last the bed.

[He moves accordingly, examining the glass on the dressing-table, the surface of the suit-cases, and the handles of the drawers, with a spy-glass for finger-marks.]

CANYNGE. [*Sotto voce to WINSOR*] The order would have been just the other way.

[The INSPECTOR goes on hands and knees and examines the carpet between the window and the bed.]

DE LEVIS. Can I come in again?

INSPECTOR. [*Standing up*] Did you open the window, sir, or was it open when you first came in?

DE LEVIS. I opened it.

INSPECTOR. Drawin' the curtains back first?

DE LEVIS. Yes.

INSPECTOR. [*Sharply*] Are you sure there was nobody in the room already?

DE LEVIS. [*Taken aback*] I don't know. I never thought. I didn't look under the bed, if you mean that.

INSPECTOR. [*Fotting*] Did not look under bed. Did you look under it after the theft?

DE LEVIS. No. I didn't.

INSPECTOR. Ah! Now, what *did* you do after you came back from your bath? Just give us that precisely.

DE LEVIS. Locked the door and left the key in. Put back my sponge, and took off my dressing-gown and put it there. [*He points to the foot-rails of the bed.*] Then I drew the curtains again.

INSPECTOR. Shutting the window?

DE LEVIS. No. I got into bed, felt for my watch to see the time. My hand struck the pocket-book, and somehow it felt thinner. I took it out, looked into it, and found the notes gone, and these shaving papers instead.

INSPECTOR. Let me have a look at those, sir. [*He applies the spy-glasses.*] And then?

DE LEVIS. I think I just sat on the bed.

INSPECTOR. Thinkin' and cursin' a bit, I suppose. Yc-es?

DE LEVIS. Then I put on my dressing-gown and went straight to Mr. Winsor.

INSPECTOR. Not lockin' the door?

DE LEVIS. No.

INSPECTOR. Exactly. [*With a certain finality.*] Now, sir, what time did you come up?

DE LEVIS. About eleven.

INSPECTOR. Precise, if you can give it me.

DE LEVIS. Well, I *know* it was eleven-fifteen when I put my watch under my pillow, before I went to the bath, and I suppose I'd been about a quarter of an hour undressing. I should say after eleven, if anything.

INSPECTOR. Just undressin'? Didn't look over your bettin' book?

DE LEVIS. No.

INSPECTOR. No prayers or anything?

DE LEVIS. No.

INSPECTOR. Pretty sloppy with your undressin' as a rule?

DE LEVIS. Yes. Say five past eleven.

INSPECTOR. Mr. Winsor, what time did the gentleman come to you?

WINSOR. Half-past eleven.

INSPECTOR. How do you fix that, sir?

WINSOR. I'd just looked at the time, and told my wife to send her maid off.

INSPECTOR. Then we've got it fixed between 11.15 and 11.30. [*Fots.*] Now, sir, before we go further I'd like to see your butler and the footman that valets this gentleman.

WINSOR. [*With distaste*] Very well, Inspector; only—my butler has been with us from a boy.

INSPECTOR. Quite so. This is just clearing the ground, sir.

WINSOR. General, d'you mind touching that bell?

[CANYNGE rings a bell by the bed.]

INSPECTOR. Well, gentlemen, there are four possibilities. Either the thief was here all the time, waiting under the bed, and slipped out after this gentleman had gone to Mr. Winsor. Or he came in with a key that fits the lock; and I'll want to see all the keys in the house. Or he came in with a skeleton key and out by the window, probably droppin' from the balcony. Or he came in by the window with a rope or ladder and out the same way. [*Pointing.*] There's a footmark here from a big boot which has been out of doors since it rained.

CANYNGE. Inspector—you—er—walked up to the window when you first came into the room.

INSPECTOR. [*Stiffly*] I had not overlooked that, General.

CANYNGE. Of course.

[*A knock on the door relieves a certain tension.*]

WINSOR. Come in.

[The footman ROBERT, a fresh-faced young man, enters, followed by TREISURE.]

INSPECTOR. You valet Mr.—Mr. De Levis, I think?

ROBERT. Yes, sir.

INSPECTOR. At what time did you take his clothes and boots?

ROBERT. Ten o'clock, sir.

INSPECTOR. [*With a pounce*] Did you happen to look under his bed?

ROBERT. No, sir.

INSPECTOR. Did you come up again, to bring the clothes back?

ROBERT. No, sir; they're still downstairs.

INSPECTOR. Did you come up again for anything?

ROBERT. No, sir.

INSPECTOR. What time did you go to bed?

ROBERT. Just after eleven, sir.

INSPECTOR. [*Scrutinizing him*] Now, be careful. Did you go to bed at all?

ROBERT. No, sir.

INSPECTOR. Then why did you say you did? There's been a theft here, and anything you say may be used against you.

ROBERT. Yes, sir. I meant, I went to my room.

INSPECTOR. Where is your room?

ROBERT. On the ground floor, at the other end of the right wing, sir.

WINSOR. It's the extreme end of the house from this, Inspector. He's with the other two footmen.

INSPECTOR. Were you there alone?

ROBERT. No, sir. Thomas and Frederick was there too.

TREISURE. That's right; I've seen them.

INSPECTOR. [*Holding up his hand for silence*] Were you out of the room again after you went in?

ROBERT. No, sir.

INSPECTOR. What were you doing, if you didn't go to bed?

ROBERT. [*To WINSOR*] Beggin' your pardon, sir, we were playin' Bridge.

INSPECTOR. Very good. You can go. I'll see *them* later on.

ROBERT. Yes, sir. They'll say the same as me.

[*He goes out, leaving a smile on the face of all except the INSPECTOR and DE LEVIS.*]

INSPECTOR. [*Sharply*] Call him back.

[*TREASURE calls "Robert," and the FOOTMAN re-enters.*]

ROBERT. Yes, sir?

INSPECTOR. Did you notice anything particular about Mr. De Levis's clothes?

ROBERT. Only that they were very good, sir.

INSPECTOR. I mean—anything peculiar?

ROBERT. [*After reflection*] Yes, sir.

INSPECTOR. Well?

ROBERT. A pair of his boots this evenin' was reduced to one, sir.

INSPECTOR. What did you make of that?

ROBERT. I thought he might have thrown the other at a cat or something.

INSPECTOR. Did you look for it?

ROBERT. No, sir; I meant to draw his attention to it in the morning.

INSPECTOR. Very good.

ROBERT. Yes, sir.

[*He goes again.*]

INSPECTOR. [*Looking at DE LEVIS*] Well, sir, there's *your* story corroborated.

DE LEVIS. [*Stiffly*] I don't know why it should need corroboration, Inspector.

INSPECTOR. In my experience, you can never have too much of that. [*To WINSOR*] I understand there's a lady in the room on this side [*pointing Left*] and a gentleman on this [*pointing Right*]. Were they in their rooms?

WINSOR. Miss Orme was; Captain Dancy not.

INSPECTOR. Do they know of the affair?

WINSOR. Yes.

INSPECTOR. Well, I'd just like the keys of their doors for a minute. My man will get them. [*He goes to the door, opens it,*

and speaks to a constable in the corridor. [To TREASURE] You can go with him. [TREASURE goes out.] In the meantime I'll just examine the balcony.

[He goes out on the balcony, followed by DE LEVIS.]

WINSOR. [To CANYNGE] Damn De Levis and his money! It's deuced invidious, all this, General.

[There is a simultaneous re-entry of the INSPECTOR from the balcony and of TREASURE and the CONSTABLE from the corridor.]

CONSTABLE. [Handing key] Room on the left, sir. [Handing key] Room on the right, sir.

[The INSPECTOR tries the keys in the door, watched with tension by the others. The keys fail.]

INSPECTOR. Put them back. [Hands keys to CONSTABLE, who goes out, followed by TREASURE.] I'll have to try every key in the house, sir.

WINSOR. Inspector, do you really think it necessary to disturb the whole house and knock up all my guests? It's most disagreeable, all this, you know. The loss of the money is not such a great matter. Mr. De Levis has a very large income.

CANYNGE. You could get the numbers of the notes from Kentman the bookmaker, Inspector; he'll probably have the big ones, anyway.

INSPECTOR. [Shaking his head] A bookie. I don't suppose he will, sir. It's come and go with them, all the time.

WINSOR. We don't want a Meldon Court scandal, Inspector.

INSPECTOR. Well, Mr. Winsor, I've formed my theory. [As he speaks, DE LEVIS comes in from the balcony.] And I don't say to try the keys is necessary to it; but strictly, I ought to exhaust the possibilities.

WINSOR. What do you say, De Levis? D'you want everybody in the house knocked up so that their keys can be tried?

DE LEVIS. [Whose face, since his return, expresses a curious excitement] No, I don't.

INSPECTOR. Very well, gentlemen. In my opinion the thief walked in before the door was locked, probably during dinner; and was under the bed. He escaped by dropping from the

balcony—the creeper at that corner [*He points stage Left*] has been violently wrenched. I'll go down now, and examine the grounds, and I'll see you again, sir. [*He makes another entry in his note-book.*] Good night, then, gentlemen!

CANYNGE. Good night!

WINSOR. [*With relief*] I'll come with you, Inspector.

[*He escorts him to the door, and they go out.*]

DE LEVIS. [*Suddenly*] General, I know who took them.

CANYNGE. 'The deuce you do! Are you following the Inspector's theory?

DE LEVIS. [*Contemptuously*] That ass! [*Pulling the shaving papers out of the case.*] No! The man who put those there was clever and cool enough to wrench that creeper off the balcony, as a blind. Come and look here, General. [*He goes to the window; the GENERAL follows. DE LEVIS points stage Right.*] See the rail of my balcony, and the rail of the next? [*He holds up the cord of his dressing-gown, stretching his arms out.*] I've measured it with this. Just over seven feet, that's all! If a man can take a standing jump on to a narrow bookcase four feet high and balance there, he'd make nothing of that. And, look here! [*He goes out on the balcony and returns with a bit of broken creeper in his hand, and holds it out into the light.*] Someone's stood on that—the stalk's crushed—the inner corner too, where he'd naturally stand when he took his jump back.

CANYNGE. [*After examining it—stiffly*] That other balcony is young Dancy's, Mr. De Levis; a soldier and a gentleman. This is an extraordinary insinuation.

DE LEVIS. Accusation.

CANYNGE. What!

DE LEVIS. I have intuitions, General; it's in my blood. I see the whole thing. Dancy came up, watched me into the bathroom, tried my door, slipped back into his dressing-room, saw my window was open, took that jump, sneaked the notes, filled the case up with these, wrenched the creeper there [*He points stage Left*] for a blind, jumped back, and slipped downstairs again. It didn't take him four minutes altogether.

CANYNGE. [*Very gravely*] This is outrageous, De Levis. Dancy says he was downstairs all the time. You must either withdraw unreservedly, or I must confront you with him.

DE LEVIS. If he'll return the notes and apologize, I'll do nothing—except cut him in future. He gave me that filly, you know, as a hopeless weed, and he's been pretty sick ever since that he was such a flat as not to see how good she was. Besides, he's hard up, I know.

CANYNGE. [*After a vexed turn up and down the room*] It's mad, sir, to jump to conclusions like this.

DE LEVIS. Not so mad as the conclusion Dancy jumped to when he lighted on my balcony.

CANYNGE. Nobody could have taken this money who did not know you had it.

DE LEVIS. How do you know that he didn't?

CANYNGE. Do you know that he did?

DE LEVIS. I haven't the least doubt of it.

CANYNGE. Without any proof. This is very ugly, De Levis. I must tell Winsor.

DE LEVIS. [*Angrily*] Tell the whole blooming lot. You think I've no feelers, but I've felt the atmosphere here, I can tell you, General. If I were in Dancy's shoes and he in mine, your tone to me would be very different.

CANYNGE. [*Suavely frigid*] I'm not aware of using any tone, as you call it. But this is a private house, Mr. De Levis, and something is due to our host and to the *esprit de corps* that exists among gentlemen.

DE LEVIS. Since when is a thief a gentleman? Thick as thieves—a good motto, isn't it?

CANYNGE. That's enough! [*He goes to the door, but stops before opening it.*] Now, look here! I have some knowledge of the world. Once an accusation like this passes beyond these walls no one can foresee the consequences. Captain Dancy is a gallant fellow, with a fine record as a soldier; and only just married. If he's as innocent as—Christ—mud will stick to him, unless the real thief is found. In the old days of swords, either

you or he would not have gone out of this room alive. If you persist in this absurd accusation, you will *both* of you go out of this room dead in the eyes of Society: you for bringing it, he for being the object of it.

DE LEVIS. Society! Do you think I don't know that I'm only tolerated for my money? Society can't add injury to insult and have my money as well, that's all. If the notes are restored I'll keep my mouth shut; if they're not, I shan't. I'm certain I'm right. I ask nothing better than to be confronted with Dancy; but, if you prefer it, deal with him in your own way—for the sake of your *esprit de corps*.

CANYNGE. 'Pon my soul, Mr. De Levis, you go too far.

DE LEVIS. Not so far as I shall go, General Canynge, if those notes aren't given back. [WINSOR comes in.]

WINSOR. Well, De Levis, I'm afraid that's all we can do for the present. So very sorry this should have happened in my house.

CANYNGE. [After a silence] There's a development, Winsor. Mr. De Levis accuses one of your guests.

WINSOR. What?

CANYNGE. Of jumping from his balcony to this, taking the notes, and jumping back. I've done my best to dissuade him from indulging the fancy—without success. Dancy must be told.

DE LEVIS. You can deal with Dancy in your own way. All I want is the money back.

CANYNGE. [Dryly] Mr. De Levis feels that he is only valued for his money, so that it is essential for him to have it back.

WINSOR. Damn it! This is monstrous, De Levis. I've known Ronald Dancy since he was a boy.

CANYNGE. You talk about adding injury to insult, De Levis. What do you call such treatment of a man who gave you the mare out of which you made this thousand pounds?

DE LEVIS. I didn't want the mare; I took her as a favour.

CANYNGE. With an eye to possibilities, I venture to think—the principle guides a good many transactions.

DE LEVIS. [*As if flicked on a raw spot*] In my race, do you mean?

CANYNGE. [*Coldly*] I said nothing of the sort.

DE LEVIS. No; you don't *say* these things, any of you.

CANYNGE. Nor did I think it.

DE LEVIS. Dancy does.

WINSOR. Really, De Levis, if this is the way you repay hospitality—

DE LEVIS. Hospitality that skins my feelings and costs me a thousand pounds!

CANYNGE. Go and get Dancy, Winsor; but don't say anything to him. [WINSOR goes out.]

CANYNGE. Perhaps you will kindly control yourself, and leave this to me.

[DE LEVIS turns to the window and lights a cigarette. WINSOR comes back, followed by DANCY.]

CANYNGE. For Winsor's sake, Dancy, we don't want any scandal or fuss about this affair. We've tried to make the police understand that. To my mind the whole thing turns on our finding who knew that De Levis had this money. It's about that we want to consult you.

WINSOR. Kentman paid De Levis round the corner in the further paddock, he says.

[DE LEVIS turns round from the window, so that he and DANCY are staring at each other.]

CANYNGE. Did you hear anything that throws light, Dancy? As it was your filly originally, we thought perhaps you might.

DANCY. I? No.

CANYNGE. Didn't hear of the sale on the course at all?

DANCY. No.

CANYNGE. Then you can't suggest anyone who could have known? Nothing else was taken, you see.

DANCY. De Levis is known to be rolling, as I am known to be stony.

CANYNGE. There are a good many people still rolling,

besides Mr. De Levis, but not many people with so large a sum in their pocket-books.

DANCY. He won two races.

DE LEVIS. Do you suggest that I bet in ready money?

DANCY. I don't know how you bet, and I don't care.

CANYNGE. You can't help us, then?

DANCY. No. I can't. Anything else?

[*He looks fixedly at DE LEVIS.*]

CANYNGE. [*Putting his hand on DANCY's arm*] Nothing else, thank you, Dancy.

[*DANCY goes. CANYNGE puts his hand up to his face. A moment's silence.*]

WINSOR. You see, De Levis? He didn't even know you'd got the money.

DE LEVIS. Very conclusive.

WINSOR. Well! You *are*——!

[*There is a knock on the door, and the INSPECTOR enters.*]

INSPECTOR. I'm just going, gentlemen. The grounds, I'm sorry to say, have yielded nothing. It's a bit of a puzzle.

CANYNGE. You've searched thoroughly?

INSPECTOR. We have, General. I can pick up nothing near the terrace.

WINSOR. [*After a look at DE LEVIS, whose face expresses too much*] H'm! You'll take it up from the other end, then, Inspector!

INSPECTOR. Well, we'll see what we can do with the book-makers about the numbers, sir. Before I go, gentlemen—you've had time to think it over—there's no one you suspect in the house, I suppose?

[*DE LEVIS's face is alive and uncertain. CANYNGE is staring at him very fixedly.*]

WINSOR. [*Emphatically*] No.

[*DE LEVIS turns and goes out on to the balcony*]

INSPECTOR. If you're coming in to the racing to-morrow, sir, you might give us a call. I'll have seen Kentman by then.

WINSOR. Right you are, Inspector. Good night, and many thanks.

INSPECTOR. You're welcome, sir. *[He goes out.]*

WINSOR. Gosh! I thought that chap *[With a nod towards the balcony]* was going to——! Look here, General, we must stop his tongue. Imagine it going the rounds. They may never find the real thief, you know. It's the very devil for Dancy.

CANYNGE. Winsor! Dancy's sleeve was damp.

WINSOR. How d'you mean?

CANYNGE. Quite damp. It's been raining.

[The two look at each other.]

WINSOR. I—I don't follow——

[His voice is hesitant and lower, showing that he does.]

CANYNGE. It was coming down hard; a minute out in it would have been enough——

[He motions with his chin towards the balcony.]

WINSOR. *[Hastily]* He must have been out on his balcony since.

CANYNGE. It stopped before I came up, half an hour ago.

WINSOR. He's been leaning on the wet stone, then.

CANYNGE. With the outside of the upper part of the arm?

WINSOR. Against the wall, perhaps. There may be a dozen explanations. *[Very low and with great concentration.]* I entirely and absolutely refuse to believe anything of the sort against Ronald Dancy—in my house. Dash it, General, we must do as we'd be done by. It hits us all—it hits us all. The thing's intolerable.

CANYNGE. I agree. Intolerable. *[Raising his voice]* Mr. De Levis!

[DE LEVIS returns into view, in the centre of the open window.]

CANYNGE. *[With cold decision]* Young Dancy was an officer and is a gentleman; this insinuation is pure supposition, and you must not make it. Do you understand me?

DE LEVIS. My tongue is still mine, General, if my money isn't!

CANYNGE. *[Unmoved]* Must not. You're a member of

three Clubs, you want to be member of a fourth. No one who makes such an insinuation against a fellow-guest in a country house, except on absolute proof, can do so without complete ostracism. Have we your word to say nothing?

DE LEVIS. Social blackmail? H'm!

CANYNGE. Not at all—simple warning. If you consider it necessary in your interests to start this scandal—no matter how, we shall consider it necessary in ours to dissociate ourselves completely from one who so recklessly disregards the unwritten code.

DE LEVIS. Do you think your code applies to me? Do you, General?

CANYNGE. To anyone who aspires to be a gentleman, sir.

DE LEVIS. Ah! But you haven't known *me* since I was a boy.

CANYNGE. Make up your mind. [*A pause.*]

DE LEVIS. I'm not a fool, General. I know perfectly well that you can get me outed.

CANYNGE. [*ICILY*] Well?

DE LEVIS. [*Sullenly*] I'll say nothing about it, unless I get more proof.

CANYNGE. Good! We have implicit faith in Dancy.

[*There is a moment's encounter of eyes; the GENERAL's steady, shrewd, impassive; WINSOR's angry and defiant; DE LEVIS's mocking, a little triumphant, malicious. Then CANYNGE and WINSOR go to the door, and pass out.*]

DE LEVIS. [*To himself*] Rats!

The curtain falls.

ACT II

SCENE I

Afternoon, three weeks later, in the card-room of a London Club. A fire is burning, Left. A door, Right, leads to the billiard-room. Rather Left of Centre, at a card table, LORD ST. ERTH, an old John Bull, sits facing the audience; to his right is GENERAL CANYNGE, to his left AUGUSTUS BORRING, an essential Clubman, about thirty-five years old, with a very slight and rather becoming stammer or click in his speech. The fourth Bridge player, CHARLES WINSOR, stands with his back to the fire.

BORRING. And the r-rub.

WINSOR. By George! You do hold cards, Borring.

ST. ERTH. [*Who has lost*] Not a patch on the old whist—this game. Don't know why I play it—never did.

CANYNGE. St. Erth, shall we raise the flag for whist again?

WINSOR. No go, General. You can't go back on pace. No getting a man to walk when he knows he can fly. The young men won't look at it.

BORRING. Better develop it so that t-two can sit out, General.

ST. ERTH. We ought to have stuck to the old game. Wish I'd gone to Newmarket, Canynge, in spite of the weather.

CANYNGE. [*Looking at his watch*] Let's hear what's won the Cambridgeshire. Ring, won't you, Winsor? [*WINSOR rings.*]

ST. ERTH. By the way, Canynge, young De Levis was blackballed.

CANYNGE. What!

ST. ERTH. I looked in on my way down.

[*CANYNGE sits very still, and WINSOR utters a disturbed sound.*]

BORRING. But of c-course he was, General. What did you expect?
[*A FOOTMAN enters.*]

FOOTMAN. Yes, my lord?

ST. ERTH. What won the Cambridgeshire?

FOOTMAN. Rosemary, my lord. Sherbert second; Barbizon third. Nine to one the winner.

WINSOR. Thank you. That's all. [FOOTMAN goes.]

BORRING. Rosemary! And De Levis sold her! But he got a good p-price, I suppose. [The other three look at him.]

ST. ERTH. Many a slip between price and pocket, young man.

CANYNGE. Cut! [They cut.]

BORRING. I say, is that the yarn that's going round about his having had a lot of m-money stolen in a country house? By Jove! He'll be pretty s-sick.

WINSOR. You and I, Borring. [He sits down in CANYNGE's chair, and the GENERAL takes his place by the fire.]

BORRING. Phew! Won't Dancy be mad! He gave that filly away to save her keep. He was rather pleased to find somebody who'd take her. Kentman must have won a p-pot. She was at thirty-threes a fortnight ago.

ST. ERTH. All the money goes to fellows who don't know a horse from a haystack.

CANYNGE. [Profoundly] And care less. Yes! We want men racing to whom a horse means something.

BORRING. I thought the horse m-meant the same to everyone, General—chance to get the b-better of one's neighbour.

CANYNGE. [With feeling] The horse is a noble animal, sir, as you'd know if you'd owed your life to them as often as I have.

BORRING. They always try to take mine, General. I shall never belong to the noble f-fellowship of the horse.

ST. ERTH. [Dryly] Evidently. Deal!

[As BORRING begins to deal the door is opened and MAJOR COLFORD appears—a lean and moustached cavalryman.]

BORRING. Hallo, C-Colford.

COLFORD. General!

[Something in the tone of his voice brings them all to a standstill.]

COLFORD. I want your advice. Young De Levis in there

[*He points to the billiard-room from which he has just come*] has started a blasphemous story——

CANYNGE. One moment. Mr. Borring, d'you mind——

COLFORD. It makes no odds, General. Four of us in there heard him. He's saying it was Ronald Dancy robbed him down at Winsor's. The fellow's mad over losing the price of that filly now she's won the Cambridgeshire.

BORRING. [*All ears*] Dancy! Great S-Scott!

COLFORD. Dancy's in the Club. If he hadn't been I'd have taken it on myself to wring the bounder's neck.

[*WINSOR and BORRING have risen. ST. ERTH alone remains seated.*]

CANYNGE. [*After consulting ST. ERTH with a look*] Ask De Levis to be good enough to come in here. Borring, you might see that Dancy doesn't leave the Club. We shall want him. Don't say anything to him, and use your tact to keep people off.

[*BORRING goes out, followed by COLFORD.*]

WINSOR. Result of hearing he was blackballed—pretty slippery.

CANYNGE. St. Erth, I told you there was good reason when I asked you to back young De Levis. Winsor and I knew of this insinuation; I wanted to keep his tongue quiet. It's just wild assertion; to have it bandied about was unfair to Dancy. The duel used to keep people's tongues in order.

ST. ERTH. H'm! It never settled anything, except who could shoot straightest.

COLFORD. [*Reappearing*] De Levis says he's nothing to add to what he said to you before, on the subject.

CANYNGE. Kindly tell him that if he wishes to remain a member of this Club he must account to the Committee for such a charge against a fellow-member. Four of us are here, and form a quorum.

[*COLFORD goes out again.*]

ST. ERTH. Did Kentman ever give the police the numbers of those notes, Winsor?

WINSOR. He only had the numbers of two—the hundred, and one of the fifties.

ST. ERTH. And they haven't traced 'em?

WINSOR. Not yet.

[*As he speaks, DE LEVIS comes in. He is in a highly-coloured, not to say excited state. COLFORD follows him.*]

DE LEVIS. Well, General Canynge! It's a little too strong all this—a little too strong. [*Under emotion his voice is slightly more exotic.*]

CANYNGE. [*Calmly*] It is obvious, Mr. De Levis, that you and Captain Dancy can't both remain members of this Club. We ask you for an explanation before requesting one resignation or the other.

DE LEVIS. You've let me down.

CANYNGE. What!

DE LEVIS. Well, I shall tell people that you and Lord St. Erth backed me up for one Club, and asked me to resign from another.

CANYNGE. It's a matter of indifference to me, sir, what you tell people.

ST. EARTH. [*Dryly*] You seem a venomous young man.

DE LEVIS. I'll tell you what seems to me venomous, my lord—chasing a man like a pack of hounds because he isn't your breed.

CANYNGE. You appear to have your breed on the brain, sir. Nobody else does, so far as I know.

DE LEVIS. Suppose I had robbed Dancy, would you chase him out for complaining of it?

COLFORD. My God! If you repeat that——

CANYNGE. Steady, Colford!

WINSOR. You make this accusation that Dancy stole your money in my house on no proof—no proof; and you expect Dancy's friends to treat you as if you were a gentleman! That's too strong, if you like!

DE LEVIS. No proof? Kentman told me at Newmarket yesterday that Dancy *did* know of the sale. He told Goole, and Goole says that he himself spoke of it to Dancy.

WINSOR. Well—if he did?

DE LEVIS. Dancy told you he *didn't* know of it in General

Canynge's presence, and mine. [To CANYNGE] You can't deny that, if you want to.

CANYNGE. Choose your expressions more nicely, please!

DE LEVIS. Proof! Did they find any footmarks in the grounds below that torn creeper? Not a sign! You saw how he can jump; he won ten pounds from me that same evening betting on what he knew was a certainty. That's your Dancy—a common sharper!

CANYNGE. [*Nodding towards the billiard-room*] Are those fellows still in there, Colford?

COLFORD. Yes.

CANYNGE. Then bring Dancy up, will you? But don't say anything to him.

COLFORD. [*To DE LEVIS*] You may think yourself damned lucky if he doesn't break your neck. [*He goes out. The three who are left with DE LEVIS avert their eyes from him.*]

DE LEVIS. [*Smouldering*] I have a memory, and a sting too. Yes, my lord—since you are good enough to call me venomous. [*To CANYNGE*] I quite understand—I'm marked for Coventry now, whatever happens. Well, I'll take Dancy with me.

ST. ERTH. [*To himself*] This Club has always had a decent, quiet name.

WINSOR. Are you going to retract, and apologize in front of Dancy and the members who heard you?

DE LEVIS. No fear!

ST. ERTH. You must be a very rich man, sir. A jury is likely to take the view that money can hardly compensate for an accusation of that sort. [*DE LEVIS stands silent.*]

CANYNGE. Courts of law require proof.

ST. ERTH. He can make it a criminal action.

WINSOR. Unless you stop this at once, you may find yourself in prison. *If* you can stop it, that is.

ST. ERTH. If I were young Dancy, nothing should induce me.

DE LEVIS. But you didn't steal my money, Lord St. Erth.

ST. ERTH. You're deuced positive, sir. So far as I could understand it, there were a dozen ways you could have been

robbed. It seems to me you value other men's reputations very lightly.

DE LEVIS. Confront me with Dancy and give me fair play.

WINSOR. [*Aside to CANYNGE*] Is it fair to Dancy not to let him know?

CANYNGE. Our duty is to the Club now, Winsor. We must have this cleared up. [*COLFORD comes in, followed by BORRING and DANCY.*]

ST. EARTH. Captain Dancy, a serious accusation has been made against you by this gentleman in the presence of several members of the Club.

DANCY. What is it?

ST. EARTH. That you robbed him of that money at Winsor's.

DANCY. [*Hard and tense*] Indeed! On what grounds is he good enough to say that?

DE LEVIS. [*Tense too*] You gave me that filly to save yourself her keep, and you've been mad about it ever since; you knew from Goole that I had sold her to Kentman and been paid in cash, yet I heard you myself deny that you knew it. You had the next room to me, and you can jump like a cat, as we saw that evening; I found some creepers crushed by a weight on my balcony on that side. When I went to the bath your door was open, and when I came back it was shut.

CANYNGE. That's the first we have heard about the door.

DE LEVIS. I remembered it afterwards.

ST. EARTH. Well, Dancy?

DANCY. [*With intense deliberation*] I'll settle this matter with any weapons, when and where he likes.

ST. EARTH. [*Dryly*] It can't be settled that way—you know very well. You must take it to the Courts, unless he retracts.

DANCY. Will you retract?

DE LEVIS. Why did you tell General Canynge you didn't know Kentman had paid me in cash?

DANCY. Because I didn't.

DE LEVIS. Then Kentman and Goole lied—for no reason?

DANCY. That's nothing to do with me.

DE LEVIS. If you were downstairs all the time, as you say, why was your door first open and then shut?

DANCY. Being downstairs, how should I know? The wind, probably.

DE LEVIS. I should like to hear what your wife says about it.

DANCY. Leave my wife alone, you damned Jew!

ST. ERTH. Captain Dancy!

DE LEVIS. [*White with rage*] Thief!

DANCY. Will you fight?

DE LEVIS. You're very smart—dead men tell no tales. No! Bring your action, and we shall see. [*DANCY takes a step towards him, but CANYNGE and WINSOR interpose.*]

ST. ERTH. That'll do, Mr. De Levis; we won't keep you. [*He looks round.*] Kindly consider your membership suspended till this matter has been threshed out.

DE LEVIS. [*Tremulous with anger*] Don't trouble yourselves about my membership. I resign it. [*To DANCY*] You called me a damned Jew. My race was old when you were all savages. I am proud to be a Jew. *Au revoir*, in the Courts.

[*He goes out, and silence follows his departure.*]

ST. ERTH. Well, Captain Dancy?

DANCY. If the brute won't fight, what am I to do, sir?

ST. ERTH. We've told you—take action, to clear your name.

DANCY. Colford, you saw me in the hall writing letters after our game.

COLFORD. Certainly I did; you were there when I went to the smoking-room.

CANYNGE. How long after you left the billiard-room?

COLFORD. About five minutes.

DANCY. It's impossible for me to prove that I was there all the time.

CANYNGE. It's for De Levis to prove what he asserts. You heard what he said about Goole?

DANCY. If he told me, I didn't take it in.

ST. ERTH. This concerns the honour of the Club. Are you going to take action?

DANCY. [*Slowly*] That is a very expensive business, Lord St. Erth, and I'm hard up. I must think it over. [*He looks round from face to face.*] Am I to take it that there is a doubt in your minds, gentlemen?

COLFORD. [*Emphatically*] No.

CANYNGE. That's not the question, Dancy. This accusation was overheard by various members, and we represent the Club. If you don't take action, judgment will naturally go by default.

DANCY. I might prefer to look on the whole thing as beneath contempt. [*He turns and goes out. When he is gone there is an even longer silence than after DE LEVIS's departure.*]

ST. ERTH. [*Abruptly*] I don't like it.

WINSOR. I've known him all his life.

COLFORD. You may have my head if he did it, Lord St. Erth. He and I have been in too many holes together. By Gad! My toe itches for that fellow's butt end.

BORRING. I'm sorry; but has he t-taken it in quite the right way? I should have thought—hearing it s-suddenly——

COLFORD. Bosh!

WINSOR. It's perfectly damnable for him.

ST. ERTH. More damnable if he did it, Winsor.

BORRING. The Courts are b-beastly distrustful, don't you know.

COLFORD. His word's good enough for me.

CANYNGE. We're as anxious to believe Dancy as you, Colford, for the honour of the Army and the Club.

WINSOR. Of course, he'll bring a case, when he's thought it over.

ST. ERTH. What are we to do in the meantime?

COLFORD. If Dancy's asked to resign, you may take my resignation too.

BORRING. I thought his wanting to f-fight him a bit screeny.

COLFORD. Wouldn't you have wanted a shot at the brute? A law court? Pah!

WINSOR. Yes. What'll be his position even if he wins?

BORRING. Damages, and a stain on his c-character.

WINSOR. Quite so, unless they find the real thief. People always believe the worst.

COLFORD. [*Glaring at BORRING*] They do.

CANYNGE. There is no decent way out of a thing of this sort.

ST. ERTH. No. [*Rising.*] It leaves a bad taste. I'm sorry for young Mrs. Dancy—poor woman!

BORRING. Are you going to play any more?

ST. ERTH. [*Abruptly*] No, sir. Good night to you. Canynge, can I give you a lift? [*He goes out, followed by CANYNGE.*]

BORRING. [*After a slight pause*] Well, I shall go and take the t-temperature of the Club. [*He goes out.*]

COLFORD. Damn that effeminate stammering chap! What can we do for Dancy, Winsor?

WINSOR. Colford! [*A slight pause.*] The General felt his coat sleeve that night, and it was wet.

COLFORD. Well! What proof's that? No, by George! An old school-fellow, a brother officer, and a pal.

WINSOR. If he did do it——

COLFORD. He didn't. But if he did, I'd stick to him, and see him through it, if I could. [*WINSOR walks over to the fire, stares into it, turns round and stares at COLFORD, who is standing motionless.*] Yes, by God!

The curtain falls.

SCENE II *

Morning of the following day. The DANCYS' flat. In the sitting-room of this small abode MABEL DANCY and MARGARET ORME are sitting full face to the audience, on a couch in the centre of the room, in front of the imaginary window. There is a fireplace, Left, with fire burning; a door below it, Left; and a door on the Right, facing the audience, leads to a corridor and the outer door of the flat, which is visible. Their voices are heard in rapid exchange; then as the curtain rises, so does MABEL.

* NOTE.—This should be a small set capable of being set quickly within that of the previous scene.

MABEL. But it's monstrous!

MARGARET. Of course! [*She lights a cigarette and hands the case to MABEL, who, however, sees nothing but her own thoughts.*] De Levis might just as well have pitched on me, except that I can't jump more than six inches in these skirts.

MABEL. It's wicked! Yesterday afternoon at the Club, did you say? Ronny hasn't said a word to me. Why?

MARGARET. [*With a long puff of smoke*] Doesn't want you bothered.

MABEL. But— Good heavens!—— Me!

MARGARET. Haven't you found out, Mabel, that he isn't exactly communicative? No desperate character is.

MABEL. Ronny?

MARGARET. Gracious! Wives *are* at a disadvantage, especially early on. You've never hunted with him, my dear. I have. He takes more sudden decisions than any man I ever knew. He's taking one now, I'll bet.

MABEL. That beast, De Levis! I was in our room next door all the time.

MARGARET. Was the door into Ronny's dressing-room open?

MABEL. I don't know; I—I think it was.

MARGARET. Well, you can say so in court anyway. Not that it matters. Wives are liars by law.

MABEL. [*Staring down at her*] What do you mean—Court?

MARGARET. My dear, he'll have to bring an action for defamation of character, or whatever they call it.

MABEL. Were they talking of this last night at the Winsors'?

MARGARET. Well, you know a dinner-table, Mabel—Scandal is heaven-sent at this time of year.

MABEL. It's terrible, such a thing—terrible!

MARGARET. [*Gloomily*] If only Ronny weren't known to be so broke.

MABEL. [*With her hands to her forehead*] I can't realize—I simply can't. If there's a case would it be all right afterwards?

MARGARET. Do you remember St. Offert—cards? No, you wouldn't—you were in high frocks. Well, St. Offert got

damages, but he also got the hoof, underneath. He lives in Ireland. There isn't the slightest connection, so far as I can see, Mabel, between innocence and reputation. Look at me!

MABEL. We'll fight it tooth and nail!

MARGARET. Mabel, you're pure wool, right through; everybody's sorry for you.

MABEL. It's for *him* they ought——

MARGARET. [*Again handing the cigarette case*] Do smoke, old thing. [*MABEL takes a cigarette this time, but does not light it.*] It isn't altogether simple. General Canynge was there last night. You don't mind my being beastly frank, do you?

MABEL. No. I want it.

MARGARET. Well, he's all for *esprit de corps* and that. But he was awfully silent.

MABEL. I hate half-hearted friends. Loyalty comes before everything.

MARGARET. Ye-es; but loyalties cut up against each other sometimes, you know.

MABEL. I *must* see Ronny. D'you mind if I go and try to get him on the telephone?

MARGARET. Rather not. [*MABEL goes out by the door Left.*] Poor kid! [*She curls herself into a corner of the sofa, as if trying to get away from life. The bell rings. MARGARET stirs, gets up, and goes out into the corridor, where she opens the door to LADY ADELA WINSOR, whom she precedes into the sitting-room.*] Enter the second murderer! D'you know that child knew nothing?

LADY A. Where is she?

MARGARET. Telephoning. Adela, if there's going to be an action, we shall be witnesses. I shall wear black georgette with an écu hat. Have you ever given evidence?

LADY A. Never.

MARGARET. It must be too frightfully thrilling.

LADY A. Oh! Why did I ever ask that wretch De Levis? I used to think him pathetic. Meg—did you know—— Ronald Dancy's coat was wet? The General happened to feel it.

MARGARET. So that's why he was so silent.

LADY A. Yes; and after the scene in the Club yesterday he went to see those bookmakers, and Goole—what a name!—is sure he told Dancy about the sale.

MARGARET. [*Suddenly*] I don't care. He's my third cousin. Don't you feel you *couldn't*, Adela?

LADY A. Couldn't—what?

MARGARET. Stand for De Levis against one of ourselves?

LADY A. That's very narrow, Meg.

MARGARET. Oh! I know lots of splendid Jews, and I rather liked little Ferdy; but when it comes to the point——! *They* all stick together; why shouldn't we? It's in the blood. Open your jugular, and see if you haven't got it.

LADY A. My dear, my great-grandmother was a Jewess. I'm proud of her.

MARGARET. Inoculated. [*Stretching herself.*] Prejudices, Adela—or are they loyalties—I don't know—criss-cross—we all cut each other's throats from the best of motives.

LADY A. Oh! I shall remember that. Delightful! [*Holding up a finger.*] You got it from Bergson, Meg. Isn't he wonderful?

MARGARET. Yes; have you ever read him?

LADY A. Well—No. [*Looking at the bedroom door.*] That poor child! I quite agree. I shall tell everybody it's ridiculous. You don't really think Ronald Dancy——?

MARGARET. I don't know, Adela. There are people who simply can't live without danger. I'm rather like that myself. They're all right when they're getting the D.S.O. or shooting man-eaters; but if there's no excitement going, they'll make it—out of sheer craving. I've seen Ronny Dancy do the maddest things for no mortal reason except the risk. He's had a past, you know.

LADY A. Oh! Do tell!

MARGARET. He did splendidly in the war, of course, because it suited him; but—just before—don't you remember—a very queer bit of riding?

LADY A. No.

MARGARET. Most dare-devil thing—but not quite. You

must remember—it was awfully talked about. And then, of course, right up to his marriage—— [*She lights a cigarette.*]

LADY A. Meg, you're very tantalizing!

MARGARET. A foreign-looking girl—most plummy. Oh! Ronny's got charm—this Mabel child doesn't know in the least what she's got hold of!

LADY A. But they're so fond of each other!

MARGARET. That's the mistake. The General isn't mentioning the coat, is he?

LADY A. Oh, no! It was only to Charles. [*MABEL returns.*]

MARGARET. Did you get him?

MABEL. No; he's not at Tattersall's, nor at the Club.

[*LADY ADELA rises and greets her with an air which suggests bereavement.*]

LADY A. Nobody's going to believe this, my dear.

MABEL. [*Looking straight at her*] Nobody who does need come here, or trouble to speak to *us* again.

LADY A. That's what I was afraid of; you're going to be defiant. Now don't! Just be perfectly natural.

MABEL. So easy, isn't it? I could kill anybody who believes such a thing.

MARGARET. You'll want a solicitor, Mabel. Go to old Mr. Jacob Twisden.

LADY A. Yes; he's so comforting.

MARGARET. He got my pearls back once—without loss of life. A frightfully good fireside manner. Do get him here, Mabel, and have a heart-to-heart talk, all three of you!

MABEL. [*Suddenly*] Listen! There's Ronny!

[*DANCY comes in.*]

DANCY. [*With a smile*] Very good of you to have come.

MARGARET. Yes. We're just going. Oh! Ronny, this is quite too——

[*But his face dries her up; and sidling past, she goes.*]

LADY A. Charles sent his—love——

[*Her voice dwindles on the word, and she, too, goes.*]

DANCY. [*Crossing to his wife*] What have they been saying?

MABEL. Ronny! Why didn't you tell me?

DANCY. I wanted to see De Levis again first.

MABEL. That wretch! How dare he! Darling! [*She suddenly clasps and kisses him. He does not return the kiss, but remains rigid in her arms, so that she draws away and looks at him.*] It's hurt you awfully, I know.

DANCY. Look here, Mabel! Apart from that muck—this is a ghastly tame-cat sort of life. Let's cut it and get out to Nairobi. I can scrape up the money for that.

MABEL. [*Aghast*] But how can we? Everybody would say——

DANCY. Let them! We shan't be here.

MABEL. I couldn't bear people to think—

DANCY. I don't care a damn what people think—monkeys and cats. I never could stand their rotten menagerie. Besides, what does it matter how I act; if I bring an action and get damages—if I pound him to a jelly—it's all no good! I can't *prove* it. There'll be plenty of people unconvinced.

MABEL. But they'll find the real thief.

DANCY. [*With a queer little laugh*] Will staying here help them to do that?

MABEL. [*In a sort of agony*] Oh! I couldn't—it looks like running away. We *must* stay and fight it!

DANCY. Suppose I didn't get a verdict—you never can tell.

MABEL. But you must—I was there all the time, with the door open.

DANCY. Was it?

MABEL. I'm almost sure.

DANCY. Yes. But you're my wife.

MABEL. [*Bewildered*] Ronny, I don't understand—suppose I'd been accused of stealing pearls!

DANCY. [*Wincing*] I can't.

MABEL. But I might—just as easily. What would you think of me if I ran away from it?

DANCY. I see. [*A pause.*] All right! You shall have a run for your money. I'll go and see old Twisden.

MABEL. Let me come! [DANCY shakes his head.] Why not? I can't be happy a moment unless I'm fighting this.

[DANCY puts out his hand suddenly and grips hers.

DANCY. You are a little brick!

MABEL. [Pressing his hand to her breast and looking into his face] Do you know what Margaret called you?

DANCY. No.

MABEL. A desperate character.

DANCY. Ha! I'm not a tame cat, any more than she.

[The bell rings. MABEL goes out to the door and her voice is heard saying coldly:

MABEL. Will you wait a minute, please? [Returning.] It's De Levis—to see you. [In a low voice] Let me see him alone first. Just for a minute! Do!

DANCY. [After a moment's silence] Go ahead!

[He goes out into the bedroom.

MABEL. [Going to the door, Right] Come in. [DE LEVIS comes in, and stands embarrassed.] Yes?

DE LEVIS. [With a slight bow] Your husband, Mrs Dancy?

MABEL. He is in. Why do you want to see him?

DE LEVIS. He came round to my rooms just now, when I was out. He threatened me yesterday. I don't choose him to suppose I'm afraid of him.

MABEL. [With a great and manifest effort at self-control] Mr. De Levis, you are robbing my husband of his good name.

DE LEVIS. [Sincerely] I admire your trustfulness, Mrs. Dancy.

MABEL. [Staring at him] How can you do it? What do you want? What's your motive? You can't possibly believe that my husband is a thief!

DE LEVIS. Unfortunately.

MABEL. How dare you? How dare you? Don't you know that I was in our bedroom all the time with the door open? Do you accuse me too?

DE LEVIS. No, Mrs. Dancy.

MABEL. But you do. I must have seen, I must have heard.

DE LEVIS. A wife's memory is not very good when her husband is in danger.

MABEL. In other words, I'm lying.

DE LEVIS. No. Your wish is mother to your thought, that's all.

MABEL. [*After staring again with a sort of horror, turns to get control of herself. Then turning back to him*] Mr. De Levis, I appeal to you as a gentleman to behave to us as you would we should behave to you. Withdraw this wicked charge, and write an apology that Ronald can show.

DE LEVIS. Mrs. Dancy, I am not a gentleman, I am only a—damned Jew. Yesterday I might possibly have withdrawn to spare you. But when my race is insulted I have nothing to say to your husband, but as he wishes to see me, I've come. Please let him know.

MABEL. [*Regarding him again with that look of horror—slowly*] I think what you are doing is too horrible for words.

[*DE LEVIS gives her a slight bow, and as he does so DANCY comes quickly in, Left. The two men stand with the length of the sofa between them. MABEL, behind the sofa, turns her eyes on her husband, who has a paper in his right hand.*

DE LEVIS. You came to see me.

DANCY. Yes. I want you to sign this.

DE LEVIS. I will sign nothing.

DANCY. Let me read it: "I apologize to Captain Dancy for the reckless and monstrous charge I made against him, and I retract every word of it."

DE LEVIS. Not much!

DANCY. You will sign.

DE LEVIS. I tell you this is useless. I will sign nothing. The charge is true; you wouldn't be playing this game if it weren't. I'm going. You'll hardly try violence in the presence of your wife; and if you try it anywhere else—look out for yourself.

DANCY. Mabel, I want to speak to him alone.

MABEL. No, no!

DE LEVIS. Quite right, Mrs. Dancy. Black and tan swash-buckling will only make things worse for him.

DANCY. So you shelter behind a woman, do you, you skulking cur!

[DE LEVIS takes a step, with fists clenched and eyes blazing. DANCY, too, stands ready to spring—the movement is cut short by MABEL going quickly to her husband.]

MABEL. Don't Ronny. It's undignified! He isn't worth it.

[DANCY suddenly tears the paper in two, and flings it into the fire.]

DANCY. Get out of here, you swine!

[DE LEVIS stands a moment irresolute, then, turning to the door, he opens it, stands again for a moment with a smile on his face, then goes. MABEL crosses swiftly to the door, and shuts it as the outer door closes. Then she stands quite still looking at her husband—her face expressing a sort of startled suspense.]

DANCY. [Turning and looking at her] Well! Do you agree with him?

MABEL. What do you mean?

DANCY. That I wouldn't be playing this game unless——

MABEL. Don't! You hurt me!

DANCY. Yes. You don't know much of me, Mabel.

MABEL. Ronny!

DANCY. What did you say to that swine?

MABEL. [Her face averted] That he was robbing *us*.
[Turning to him suddenly] Ronny—you—didn't? I'd rather know.

DANCY. Ha! I thought that was coming.

MABEL. [Covering her face] Oh! How horrible of me—how horrible!

DANCY. Not at all. The thing looks bad.

MABEL. [Dropping her hands] If I can't believe in you, who can? [Going to him, throwing her arms round him, and looking up into his face.] Ronny! If all the world—I'd believe in you. You know I would.

DANCY. That's all right, Mabs! That's all right! [His

face, above her head, is contorted for a moment, then hardens into a mask.] Well, what shall we do?

MABEL. Oh! Let's go to that lawyer—let's go at once!

DANCY. All right. Get your hat on.

[MABEL passes him, and goes into the bedroom, Left. DANCY, left alone, stands quite still, staring before him. With a sudden shrug of his shoulders he moves quickly to his hat and takes it up just as MABEL returns, ready to go out. He opens the door; and crossing him, she stops in the doorway, looking up with a clear and trustful gaze as

The curtain falls.

ACT III

SCENE I

Three months later. Old Mr. JACOB TWISDEN'S Room, at the offices of Twisden and Graviter, in Lincoln's Inn Fields, is spacious, with two large windows at back, a fine old fireplace, Right, a door below it, and two doors, Left. Between the windows is a large table sideways to the window wall, with a chair in the middle on the right-hand side, a chair against the wall, and a client's chair on the left-hand side.

[GRAVITER, TWISDEN'S much younger partner, is standing in front of the right-hand window looking out on to the Fields, where the lamps are being lighted, and a taxi's engine is running down below. He turns his sanguine, shrewd face from the window towards a grandfather clock, between the doors, Left, which is striking "four." The door, Left Forward, is opened.

YOUNG CLERK. [Entering] A Mr. Gilman, sir, to see Mr. Twisden.

GRAVITER. By appointment?

YOUNG CLERK. No, sir. But important, he says.

GRAVITER. I'll see him. [The CLERK goes.]

[GRAVITER sits right of table. The CLERK returns, ushering in an oldish man, who looks what he is, the proprietor of a large modern grocery store. He wears a dark overcoat and carries a pot hat. His gingery-grey moustache and mutton-chop whiskers give him the expression of a cat.

GRAVITER. [Sizing up his social standing] Mr. Gilman? Yes.

GILMAN. [Doubtfully] Mr. Jacob Twisden?

GRAVITER. [Smiling] His partner. Graviter my name is.

GILMAN. Mr. Twisden's not in, then?

GRAVITER. No. He's at the Courts. They're just up; he should be in directly. But he'll be busy.

GILMAN. Old Mr. Jacob Twisden—I've heard of him.

GRAVITER. Most people have. [*A pause.*]

GILMAN. It's this Dancy De Levis case that's keepin' him at the Courts, I suppose? [GRAVITER *nods.*] Won't be finished for a day or two? [GRAVITER *shakes his head.*] No. Astonishin' the interest taken in it.

GRAVITER. As you say.

GILMAN. The Smart Set, eh? This Captain Dancy got the D.S.O., didn't he? [GRAVITER *nods.*] Sad to have a thing like that said about you. I thought he gave his evidence well; and his wife too. Looks as if this De Levis had got some private spite. *Searchy la femme*, I said to Mrs. Gilman only this morning, before I——

GRAVITER. By the way, sir, what is your business?

GILMAN. Well, my business here—— No, if you'll excuse me, I'd rather wait and see old Mr. Jacob Twisden. It's delicate, and I'd like his experience.

GRAVITER. [*With a shrug*] Very well; then, perhaps, you'll go in there. [*He moves towards the door, Left Back.*]

GILMAN. Thank you. [*Following.*] You see, I've never been mixed up with the law——

GRAVITER. [*Opening the door*] No?

GILMAN. And I don't want to begin. When you do, you don't know where you'll stop, do you? You see, I've only come from a sense of duty; and——other reasons.

GRAVITER. Not uncommon.

GILMAN. [*Producing card*] This is my card. Gilman's——several branches, but this is the 'ead.

GRAVITER. [*Scrutinizing card*] Exactly.

GILMAN. Grocery—I daresay you know me; or your wife does. They say old Mr. Jacob Twisden refused a knighthood. If it's not a rude question, why was that?

GRAVITER. Ask him, sir; ask him.

GILMAN. I said to my wife at the time, "He's holdin' out for a baronetcy."

[GRAVITER *closes the door with an exasperated smile.*]

YOUNG CLERK. [*Opening the door, Left Forward*] Mr. Winsor, sir, and Miss Orme.

[*They enter, and the CLERK withdraws.*]

GRAVITER. How d'you do, Miss Orme? How do you do, Winsor?

WINSOR. Twisden not back, Graviter?

GRAVITER. Not yet.

WINSOR. Well, they've got through De Levis's witnesses. Sir Frederic was at the very top of his form. It's looking quite well. But I hear they've just subpœnaed Canynge after all. His evidence is to be taken to-morrow.

GRAVITER. Oho!

WINSOR. I said Dancy ought to have called him.

GRAVITER. We considered it. Sir Frederic decided that he could use him better in cross-examination.

WINSOR. Well! I don't know that. Can I go and see him before he gives evidence to-morrow?

GRAVITER. I should like to hear Mr. Jacob on that, Winsor. He'll be in directly.

WINSOR. They had Kentman, and Goole, the Inspector, the other bobby, my footman, Dancy's banker, and his tailor.

GRAVITER. Did we shake Kentman or Goole?

WINSOR. Very little. Oh! by the way, the numbers of those two notes were given, and I see they're published in the evening papers. I suppose the police wanted that. I tell you what I find, Graviter—a general feeling that there's something behind it all that doesn't come out.

GRAVITER. The public wants its money's worth—always does in these Society cases; they brew so long beforehand, you see.

WINSOR. They're looking for something lurid.

MARGARET. When I was in the box, I thought they were looking for me. [*Taking out her cigarette case.*] I suppose I mustn't smoke, Mr. Graviter?

GRAVITER. Do!

MARGARET. Won't Mr. Jacob have a fit?

GRAVITER. Yes, but not till you've gone.

MARGARET. Just a whiff. [*She lights a cigarette.*]

WINSOR. [*Suddenly*] It's becoming a sort of Dreyfus case—people taking sides quite outside the evidence.

MARGARET. There are more of the chosen in Court every day. Mr. Graviter, have you noticed the two on the jury?

GRAVITER. [*With a smile*] No; I can't say——

MARGARET. Oh! but quite distinctly. Don't you think they ought to have been challenged?

GRAVITER. De Levis might have challenged the other ten, Miss Orme.

MARGARET. Dear me, now! I never thought of that.

[*As she speaks, the door Left Forward is opened and old Mr. JACOB TWISDEN comes in. He is tallish and narrow, sixty-eight years old, grey, with narrow whiskers curling round his narrow ears, and a narrow bow ribbon curling round his collar. He wears a long, narrow-tailed coat, and strapped trousers on his narrow legs. His nose and face are narrow, shrewd, and kindly. He has a way of narrowing his shrewd and kindly eyes. His nose is seen to twitch and sniff.*]

TWISDEN. Ah! How are you, Charles? How do you do, my dear?

MARGARET. Dear Mr. Jacob, I'm smoking. Isn't it disgusting? But they don't allow it in Court, you know. Such a pity. The Judge might have a hookah. Oh! wouldn't he look sweet—the darling!

TWISDEN. [*With a little, old-fashioned bow*] It does not become everybody as it becomes you, Margaret.

MARGARET. Mr. Jacob, how charming!

[*With a slight grimace she puts out her cigarette.*]

GRAVITER. Man called Gilman waiting in there to see you specially.

TWISDEN. Directly. Turn up the light, would you, Graviter?

GRAVITER. [*Turning up the light*] Excuse me. [*He goes.*]

WINSOR. Look here, Mr. Twisden——

TWISDEN. Sit down; sit down, my dear. [*And he himself sits behind the table, as a cup of tea is brought in to him by the YOUNG CLERK, with two Marie biscuits in the saucer.*] Will you have some, Margaret?

MARGARET. No, dear Mr. Jacob.

TWISDEN. Charles?

WINSOR. No, thanks. [*The door is closed.*]

TWISDEN. [*Dipping a biscuit in the tea*] Now, then?

WINSOR. The General knows something which on the face of it looks rather queer. Now that he's going to be called, oughtn't Dancy to be told of it, so that he may be ready with his explanation, in case it comes out?

TWISDEN. [*Pouring some tea into the saucer*] Without knowing, I can't tell you.

[WINSOR and MARGARET exchange looks, and TWISDEN drinks from the saucer.]

MARGARET. Tell him, Charles.

WINSOR. Well! It rained that evening at Meldon. The General happened to put his hand on Dancy's shoulder, and it was damp.

[TWISDEN puts the saucer down and replaces the cup in it. They both look intently at him.]

TWISDEN. I take it that General Canynge won't say anything he's not compelled to say.

MARGARET. No, of course; but, Mr. Jacob, they might ask; they know it rained. And he is such a George Washington.

TWISDEN. [*Toying with a pair of tortoise-shell glasses*] They didn't ask either of you. Still—no harm in your telling Dancy.

WINSOR. I'd rather you did it, Margaret.

MARGARET. I daresay.

[*She mechanically takes out her cigarette case, catches the lift of TWISDEN's eyebrows, and puts it back.*]

WINSOR. Well, we'll go together. I don't want Mrs. Dancy to hear.

MARGARET. Do tell me, Mr. Jacob; is he going to win?

TWISDEN. I think so, Margaret; I think so.

MARGARET. It'll be too frightful if he doesn't get a verdict, after all this. But I don't know what we shall do when it's over. I've been sitting in that Court all these three days, watching, and it's made me feel there's nothing we like better than seeing people skinned. Well, bye-bye, bless you!

[TWISDEN rises and pats her hand.]

WINSOR. Half a second, Margaret. Wait for me. [*She nods and goes out.*] Mr. Twisden, what do you really think?

TWISDEN. I am Dancy's lawyer, my dear Charles, as well as yours.

WINSOR. Well, can I go and see Canynge?

TWISDEN. Better not.

WINSOR. If they get that out of him, and recall me, am I to say he told me of it at the time?

TWISDEN. You didn't feel the coat yourself? And Dancy wasn't present? Then what Canynge told you is not evidence. *We'll stop your being asked.*

WINSOR. Thank goodness. Good-bye! [WINSOR goes out.]

[TWISDEN, behind his table, motionless, taps his teeth with the eye-glasses in his narrow, well-kept hand. After a long shake of his head and a shrug of his rather high shoulders he sniffs, goes to the window and opens it. Then crossing to the door, Left Back, he throws it open and says:]

TWISDEN. At your service, sir. [GILMAN comes forth, nursing his pot hat.] Be seated. [TWISDEN closes the window behind him, and takes his seat.]

GILMAN. [*Taking the client's chair, to the left of the table*] Mr. Twisden, I believe? My name's Gilman, head of Gilman's Department Stores. You have my card.

TWISDEN. [*Looking at the card*] Yes. What can we do for you?

GILMAN. Well, I've come to you from a sense of duty, sir, and also a feelin' of embarrassment. [*He takes from his breast pocket an evening paper.*] You see, I've been followin' this Dancy case—it's a good deal talked of in Putney—and I read this at half-past two this afternoon. To be precise at 2.25. [*He*

risers and hands the paper to TWISDEN, and with a thick gloved forefinger indicates a passage.] When I read these numbers, I 'appened to remember givin' change for a fifty-pound note—don't often 'ave one in, you know—so I went to the cash-box out of curiosity, to see that I 'adn't got it. Well, I 'ad; and here it is. [*He draws out from his breast pocket and lays before TWISDEN a fifty-pound bank-note.*] It was brought in to change by a customer of mine three days ago, and he got value for it. Now, that's a stolen note, it seems, and you'd like to know what I did. Mind you, that customer of mine I've known 'im—well—eight or nine years; an Italian he is—wine salesman, and so far's I know, a respectable man—foreign-lookin', but nothin' more. Now, this was at 'alf-past two, and I was at my head branch at Putney, where I live. I want you to mark the time, so as you'll see I 'aven't wasted a minute. I took a cab and I drove straight to my customer's private residence in Putney, where he lives with his daughter—Ricardos his name is, Paolo Ricardos. They tell me there that he's at his business shop in the City. So off I go in the cab again, and there I find him. Well, sir, I showed this paper to him and I produced the note. "Here," I said, "you brought this to me and you got value for it." Well, that man was taken aback. If I'm a judge, Mr. Twisden, he was taken aback, not to speak in a guilty way, but he was, as you might say, flummoxed. "Now," I said to him, "where did you get it—that's the point?" He took his time to answer, and then he said: "Well, Mr. Gilman," he said, "you know me; I am an honourable man. I can't tell you offhand, but I am above the board." He's foreign, you know, in his expressions. "Yes," I said, "that's all very well," I said, "but here I've got a stolen note and you've got the value for it. Now I tell you," I said, "what I'm going to do; I'm going straight with this note to Mr. Jacob Twisden, who's got this Dancy De Levis case in 'and. He's a well-known Society lawyer," I said, "of great experience." "Oh!" he said, "that is what you do?"—funny the way he speaks! "Then I come with you!"—And I've got him in the cab below. I want to tell you every-

thing before he comes up. On the way I tried to get something out of him, but I couldn't—I could *not*. "This is very awkward," I said at last. "It is, Mr. Gilman," was his reply; and he began to talk about his Sicilian claret—a very good wine, mind you; but under the circumstances it seemed to me uncalled for. Have I made it clear to you?

TWISDEN. [*Who has listened with extreme attention*] Perfectly, Mr. Gilman. I'll send down for him. [*He touches a hand-bell.*] [*The YOUNG CLERK appears at the door, Left Forward.*] A gentleman in a taxi—waiting. Ask him to be so good as to step up. Oh! and send Mr. Graviter here again. [*The YOUNG CLERK goes out.*]

GILMAN. As I told you, sir, I've been followin' this case. It's what you might call piquant. And I should be very glad if it came about that this helped Captain Dancy. I take an interest, because, to tell you the truth, [*Confidentially*] I don't like—well, not to put too fine a point upon it—'Ebrews. They work harder; they're more sober; they're honest, and they're everywhere. I've nothing against them, but the fact is—they get *on* so.

TWISDEN. [*Cocking an eye*] A thorn in the flesh, Mr. Gilman.

GILMAN. Well, I prefer my own countrymen, and that's the truth of it.

[*As he speaks, GRAVITER comes in by the door Left Forward.*]

TWISDEN. [*Pointing to the newspaper and the note*] Mr. Gilman has brought this, of which he is holder for value. His customer, who changed it three days ago, is coming up.

GRAVITER. The fifty-pounder. I see.

[*His face is long and reflective.*]

YOUNG CLERK. [*Entering*] Mr. Ricardos, sir. [*He goes out.*]

[*RICARDOS is a personable, Italian-looking man in a frock coat, with a dark moustachioed face and dark hair a little grizzled. He looks anxious, and bows.*]

TWISDEN. Mr. Ricardos? My name is Jacob Twisden. My partner. [*Holding up a finger, as RICARDOS would speak.*] Mr. Gilman has told us about this note. You took it to him, he says, three days ago; that is, on Monday, and received cash for it?

RICARDOS. Yes, sare.

TWISDEN. You were *not* aware that it was stolen?

RICARDOS. [*With his hand to his breast*] Oh! no, sare.

TWISDEN. You received it from——?

RICARDOS. A minute, sare; I would weesh to explain——
[*With an expressive shrug*] in private.

TWISDEN. [*Nodding*] Mr. Gilman, your conduct has been most prompt. You may safely leave the matter in our hands, now. Kindly let us retain this note; and ask for my cashier as you go out and give him [*He writes*] this. He will reimburse you. We will take any necessary steps ourselves.

GILMAN. [*In slight surprise, with modest pride*] Well, sir, I'm in your 'ands. I must be guided by you, with your experience. I'm glad you think I acted rightly.

TWISDEN. Very rightly, Mr. Gilman—very rightly.
[*Rising*] Good afternoon!

GILMAN. Good afternoon, sir. Good afternoon, gentlemen!
[*To TWISDEN*] I'm sure I'm very 'appy to have made your acquaintance, sir. It's a well-known name.

TWISDEN. Thank you.

[*GILMAN retreats, glances at RICARDOS, and turns again.*]

GILMAN. I suppose there's nothing else I ought to do, in the interests of the law? I'm a careful man.

TWISDEN. If there is, Mr. Gilman, we will let you know. We have your address. You may make your mind easy; but don't speak of this. It might interfere with Justice.

GILMAN. Oh! I shouldn't dream of it. I've no wish to be mixed up in anything conspicuous. That's not my principle at all. Good day, gentlemen. [*He goes.*]

TWISDEN. [*Seating himself*] Now, sir, will you sit down.
[*But RICARDOS does not sit; he stands looking uneasily across the table at GRAVITER.*] You may speak out.

RICARDOS. Well, Mr. Twesden and sare, this matter is very serious for me, and very delicate—it concairns my honour. I am in a great difficulty.

TWISDEN. When in difficulty—complete frankness, sir.

RICARDOS. It is a family matter, sare, I——

TWISDEN. Let me be frank with *you*. [*Telling his point: off on his fingers*] We have your admission that you changed this stopped note for value. It will be our duty to inform the Bank of England that it has been traced to you. You will have to account to them for your possession of it. I suggest to you that it will be far better to account frankly to us.

RICARDOS. [*Taking out a handkerchief and quite openly wiping his hands and forehead*] I received this note, sare, with others, from a gentleman, sare, in settlement of a debt of honour, and I know nothing of where he got them.

TWISDEN. H'm! that is very vague. If that is all you can tell us, I'm afraid——

RICARDOS. Gentlemen, this is very painful for me. It is my daughter's good name—— [*He again wipes his brow.*]

TWISDEN. Come, sir, speak out!

RICARDOS. [*Desperately*] The notes were a settlement to her from this gentleman, of whom she was a great friend.

TWISDEN. [*Suddenly*] I am afraid we must press you for the name of the gentleman.

RICARDOS. Sare, if I give it to you, and it does 'im 'arm, what will my daughter say? This is a bad matter for me. He behaved well to her; and she is attached to him still; sometimes she is crying yet because she lost him. And now we betray him perhaps, who knows? This is very unpleasant for me. [*Taking up the paper.*] Here it gives the number of another note—a 'undred-pound note. I 'ave that too.

[*He takes a note from his breast pocket.*]

GRAVITER. How much did he give you in all?

RICARDOS. For my daughter's settlement one thousand pounds. I understand he did not wish to give a cheque because of his marriage. So I did not think anything about it being in notes, you see.

TWISDEN. When did he give you this money?

RICARDOS. The middle of Octobare last.

TWISDEN. [*Suddenly looking up*] Mr. Ricardos, was it Captain Dancy?

RICARDOS. [*Again wiping his forehead*] Gentlemen, I am so fond of my daughter. I have only the one, and no wife.

TWISDEN. [*With an effort*] Yes, yes; but I must know.

RICARDOS. Sare, if I tell you, will you give me your good word that my daughter shall not hear of it?

TWISDEN. So far as we are able to prevent it—certainly.

RICARDOS. Sare, I trust you.—It was Captain Dancy.

[*A long pause.*]

GRAVITER. [*Suddenly*] Were you blackmailing him?

TWISDEN. [*Holding up his hand*] My partner means, did you press him for this settlement?

RICARDOS. I did think it my duty to my daughter to ask that he make compensation to her.

TWISDEN. With threats that you would tell his wife?

RICARDOS. [*With a shrug*] Captain Dancy was a man of honour. He said: "Of course I will do this." I trusted him. And a month later I did remind him, and he gave me this money for her. I do not know where he got it—I do not know. Gentlemen, I have invested it all on her—every penny—except this note, for which I had the purpose to buy her a necklace. That is the swearéd truth.

TWISDEN. I must keep this note. [*He touches the hundred-pound note.*] You will not speak of this to anyone. I may recognize that you were a holder for value received—others might take a different view. Good day, sir. Graviter, see Mr. Ricardos out, and take his address.

RICARDOS. [*Pressing his hand over the breast of his frock coat—with a sigh*] Gentlemen, I beg you—remember what I said. [*With a roll of his eyes.*] My daughter—I am not happy. Good day. [*He turns and goes out slowly, Left Forward, followed by GRAVITER.*]

TWISDEN. [*To himself*] Young Dancy! [*He pins the two notes together and places them in an envelope, then stands motionless*]

except for his eyes and hands, which restlessly express the disturbance within him.]

[GRAVITER returns, carefully shuts the door, and going up to him, hands him RICARDOS' card.]

[Looking at the card.] Villa Benvenuto. This will have to be verified, but I'm afraid it's true. That man was not acting.

GRAVITER. What's to be done about Dancy?

TWISDEN. Can you understand a gentleman——?

GRAVITER. I don't know, sir. The war loosened "form" all over the place. I saw plenty of that myself. And some men have no moral sense. From the first I've had doubts.

TWISDEN. We can't go on with the case.

GRAVITER. Phew! . . . [*A moment's silence.*] Gosh! It's an awful thing for his wife.

TWISDEN. Yes.

GRAVITER. [*Touching the envelope*] Chance brought this here, sir. That man won't talk—he's too scared.

TWISDEN. Gilman.

GRAVITER. Too respectable. If De Levis got those notes back, and the rest of the money, anonymously?

TWISDEN. But the case, Graviter; the case.

GRAVITER. I don't believe this alters what I've been thinking.

TWISDEN. Thought is one thing—knowledge another. There's duty to our profession. Ours is a fine calling. On the good faith of solicitors a very great deal hangs.

[*He crosses to the hearth as if warmth would help him.*]

GRAVITER. It'll let him in for a prosecution. He came to us in confidence.

TWISDEN. Not as against the law.

GRAVITER. No. I suppose not. [*A pause.*] By Jove, I don't like losing this case. I don't like the admission we backed such a wrong 'un.

TWISDEN. Impossible to go on. Apart from ourselves, there's Sir Frederic. We must disclose to him—can't let him go on in the dark. Complete confidence between solicitor and counsel is the essence of professional honour.

GRAVITER. What are you going to do then, sir?

TWISDEN. See Dancy at once. Get him on the 'phone.

GRAVITER. [*Taking up the telephone*] Get me Captain Dancy's flat. . . . What? . . . [*To TWISDEN*] Mrs. Dancy is here. That's *à propos* with a vengeance. Are you going to see her, sir?

TWISDEN. [*After a moment's painful hesitation*] I must.

GRAVITER. [*Telephoning*] Bring Mrs. Dancy up.

[*He turns to the window.*]

[*MABEL DANCY is shown in, looking very pale. TWISDEN advances from the fire, and takes her hand.*]

MABEL. Major Colford's taken Ronny off in his car for the night. I thought it would do him good. I said I'd come round in case there was anything you wanted to say before to-morrow.

TWISDEN. [*Taken aback*] Where have they gone?

MABEL. I don't know, but he'll be home before ten o'clock to-morrow. Is there anything?

TWISDEN. Well, I'd like to see him before the Court sits. Send him on here as soon as he comes.

MABEL. [*With her hand to her forehead*] Oh! Mr. Twisden, when will it be over? My head's getting awful sitting in that Court.

TWISDEN. My dear Mrs. Dancy, there's no need at all for you to come down to-morrow; take a rest and nurse your head.

MABEL. Really and truly?

TWISDEN. Yes; it's the very best thing you can do.

[*GRAVITER turns his head, and looks at them unobserved.*]

MABEL. How do you think it's going?

TWISDEN. It went very well to-day; very well indeed.

MABEL. You must be awfully fed up with us.

TWISDEN. My dear young lady, that's our business. [*He takes her hand. [MABEL's face suddenly quivers. She draws her hand away, and covers her lips with it.]*] There, there! You want a day off badly.

MABEL. I'm so tired of——! Thank you so much for all you're doing. Good night! Good night, Mr. Graviter!

GRAVITER. Good night, Mrs. Dancy. [MABEL goes.]

GRAVITER. D'you know, I believe she knows.

TWISDEN. No, no! She believes in him implicitly. A staunch little woman. Poor thing!

GRAVITER. Hasn't that shaken you, sir? It has me.

TWISDEN. No, no! I—I can't go on with the case. It's breaking faith. Get Sir Frederic's chambers.

GRAVITER. [Telephoning, and getting a reply, looks round at TWISDEN] Yes?

TWISDEN. Ask if I can come round and see him.

GRAVITER. [Telephoning] Can Sir Frederic spare Mr. Twisden a few minutes now if he comes round? [Receiving reply.] He's gone down to Brighton for the night.

TWISDEN. H'm! What hotel?

GRAVITER. [Telephoning] What's his address? What . . . ?
[To TWISDEN] The Bedford.

TWISDEN. I'll go down.

GRAVITER. [Telephoning] Thank you. All right.
[He rings off.]

TWISDEN. Just look out the trains down and up early to-morrow.

[GRAVITER takes up a A B C, and TWISDEN takes up the RICARDOS card.]

TWISDEN. Send to this address in Putney, verify the fact that Ricardos has a daughter, and give me a trunk call to Brighton. Better go yourself, Graviter. If you see her, don't say anything, of course—invent some excuse. [GRAVITER nods.] I'll be up in time to see Dancy.

GRAVITER. By George! I feel bad about this.

TWISDEN. Yes. But professional honour comes first.
What time is that train? [He bends over the A B C.]

The curtain falls.

SCENE II

The same room on the following morning at ten twenty-five, by the grandfather clock.

[*The YOUNG CLERK is ushering in DANCY, whose face is perceptibly harder than it was three months ago, like that of a man who has lived under great restraint.*

DANCY. You wanted to see me before the Court sat.

YOUNG CLERK. Yes, sir. Mr. Twisden will see you in one minute. He had to go out of town last night.

[*He prepares to open the waiting-room door.*

DANCY. Were you in the war?

YOUNG CLERK. Yes.

DANCY. How can you stick this?

YOUNG CLERK. [*With a smile*] My trouble was to stick that, sir.

DANCY. But you get no excitement from year's end to year's end. It'd drive me mad.

YOUNG CLERK. [*Shyly*] A case like this is pretty exciting. I'd give a lot to see us win it.

DANCY. [*Staring at him*] Why? What is it to you?

YOUNG CLERK. I don't know, sir. It's—it's like football—you want your side to win. [*He opens the waiting-room door. Expanding.*] You see some rum starts, too, in a lawyer's office in a quiet way.

[*DANCY enters the waiting-room, and the YOUNG CLERK, shutting the door, meets TWISDEN as he comes in, Left Forward, and takes from him overcoat, top hat, and a small bag.*

YOUNG CLERK. Captain Dancy's waiting, sir.

[*He indicates the waiting-room.*

TWISDEN. [*Narrowing his lips*] Very well. Mr. Graviter gone to the Courts?

YOUNG CLERK. Yes, sir.

TWISDEN. Did he leave anything for me?

YOUNG CLERK. On the table, sir.

TWISDEN. [*Taking up an envelope*] Thank you.

[*The CLERK goes.*]

TWISDEN. [*Opening the envelope and reading*] "All corroborates." H'm! [*He puts it in his pocket and takes out of an envelope the two notes, lays them on the table, and covers them with a sheet of blotting-paper; stands a moment preparing himself, then goes to the door of the waiting-room, opens it, and says:*] Now, Captain Dancy. Sorry to have kept you waiting.

DANCY. [*Entering*] Winsor came to me yesterday about General Canynge's evidence. Is that what you wanted to speak to me about?

TWISDEN. No. It isn't that.

DANCY. [*Looking at his wrist watch*] By me it's just on the half-hour, sir.

TWISDEN. Yes. I don't want you to go to the Court.

DANCY. Not?

TWISDEN. I have very serious news for you.

DANCY. [*Winning and collecting himself*] Oh!

TWISDEN. These two notes. [*He uncovers the notes.*] After the Court rose yesterday we had a man called Ricardos here. [*A pause.*] Is there any need for me to say more?

DANCY. [*Unflinching*] No. What now?

TWISDEN. Our duty is plain; we could not go on with the case. I have consulted Sir Frederic. He felt—he felt that he must throw up his brief—and he will do that the moment the Court sits. Now I want to talk to you about what you're going to do.

DANCY. That's very good of you, considering.

TWISDEN. I don't pretend to understand, but I imagine you may have done this in a moment of reckless bravado, feeling, perhaps, that as you gave the mare to De Levis, the money was by rights as much yours as his. [*Stopping DANCY, who is about to speak, with a gesture.*] To satisfy a debt of honour to this—lady; and, no doubt, to save your wife from hearing of it from the man, Ricardos. Is that so?

DANCY. To the life.

TWISDEN. It was mad, Captain Dancy, mad——! But the question now is: What do you owe to your wife? She doesn't dream—I suppose?

DANCY. [*With a twitching face*] No.

TWISDEN. We can't tell what the result of this collapse will be. The police have the theft in hand. They may issue a warrant. The money could be refunded, and the costs paid—somehow that can all be managed. But it may not help. In any case, what end is served by your staying in the country? You can't save your honour—that's gone. You can't save your wife's peace of mind. If she sticks to you—do you think she will?

DANCY. Not if she's wise.

TWISDEN. Better go! There's a war in Morocco.

DANCY. [*With a bitter smile*] Good old Morocco!

TWISDEN. Will you go, then, at once, and leave me to break it to your wife?

DANCY. I don't know yet.

TWISDEN. You must decide quickly, to catch a boat train. Many a man has made good. You're a fine soldier.

DANCY. There are alternatives.

TWISDEN. Now, go straight from this office. You've a passport, I suppose; you won't need a *visa* for France, and from there you can find means to slip over. Have you got money on you? [*Dancy nods.*] We will see what we can do to stop or delay proceedings.

DANCY. It's all damned kind of you. [*With difficulty*] But I must think of my wife. Give me a few minutes.

TWISDEN. Yes, yes; go in there and think it out.

[*He goes to the door, Right, and opens it. DANCY passes him and goes out. TWISDEN rings a bell and stands waiting.*]

CLERK. [*Entering*] Yes, sir?

TWISDEN. Tell them to call a taxi.

CLERK. [*Who has a startled look*] Yes, sir. Mr. Graviter has come in, sir, with General Canynge. Are you disengaged?

TWISDEN. Yes. [*The CLERK goes out, and almost immedi-*

ately GRAVITER and CANYNGE *enter.*] Good morning, General.
[*To* GRAVITER] Well?

GRAVITER. Sir Frederic got up at once and said that since the publication of the numbers of those notes, information had reached him which forced him to withdraw from the case. Great sensation, of course. I left Bromley in charge. There'll be a formal verdict for the defendant, with costs. Have you told Dancy?

TWISDEN. Yes. He's in there deciding what he'll do.

CANYNGE. [*Grave and vexed*] This is a dreadful thing, Twisden I've been afraid of it all along. A soldier! A gallant fellow, too. What on earth got into him?

TWISDEN. There's no end to human nature, General.

GRAVITER. You can see queerer things in the papers, any day.

CANYNGE. That poor young wife of his! Winsor gave me a message for you, Twisden. If money's wanted quickly to save proceedings, draw on him. Is there anything *I* can do?

TWISDEN. I've advised him to go straight off to Morocco.

CANYNGE. I don't know that an asylum isn't the place for him. He must be off his head at moments. That jump—crazy! He'd have got a verdict on that alone—if they'd seen those balconies. I was looking at them when I was down there last Sunday. Daring thing, Twisden. Very few men, on a dark night—— He risked his life twice. That's a shrewd fellow— young De Levis. He spotted Dancy's nature.

[*The YOUNG CLERK enters.*

CLERK. The taxi's here, sir. Will you see Major Colford and Miss Orme?

TWISDEN. Graviter—— No; show them in.

[*The YOUNG CLERK goes.*

CANYNGE. Colford's badly cut up.

[*MARGARET ORME and COLFORD enter.*

COLFORD. [*Striding forward*] There must be some mistake about this, Mr. Twisden.

TWISDEN. Hssh! Dancy's in there. He's admitted it.

[*Voices are subdued at once.*

COLFORD. What? [*With emotion.*] If it were my own brother, I couldn't feel it more. But—damn it! What right had that fellow to chuck up the case—without letting him know, too. I came down with Dancy this morning, and he knew nothing about it.

TWISDEN. [*Coldly*] That was unfortunately unavoidable.

COLFORD. Guilty or not, you ought to have stuck to him—it's not playing the game, Mr. Twisden.

TWISDEN. You must allow me to judge where my duty lay, in a very hard case.

COLFORD. I thought a man was safe with his solicitor.

CANYNGE. Colford, you don't understand professional etiquette.

COLFORD. No, thank God!

TWISDEN. When you have been as long in your profession as I have been in mine, Major Colford, you will know that duty to your calling outweighs duty to friend or client.

COLFORD. But I serve the Country.

TWISDEN. And I serve the Law, sir.

CANYNGE. Graviter, give me a sheet of paper. I'll write a letter for him.

MARGARET. [*Going up to TWISDEN*] Dear Mr. Jacob—pay De Levis. You know my pearls—put them up the spout again. Don't let Ronny be——

TWISDEN. Money isn't the point, Margaret.

MARGARET. It's ghastly! It really is.

COLFORD. I'm going in to shake hands with him.

[*He starts to cross the room.*]

TWISDEN. Wait! We want him to go straight off to Morocco. Don't upset him. [*To COLFORD and MARGARET*] I think you had better go. If, a little later, Margaret, you could go round to Mrs. Dancy——

COLFORD. Poor little Mabel Dancy! It's perfect hell for her.

[*They have not seen that DANCY has opened the door behind them.*]

DANCY. It is! [*They all turn round in consternation.*]

COLFORD. [*With a convulsive movement*] Old boy!

DANCY. No good, Colford. [*Gazing round at them.*] Oh! clear out—I can't stand commiseration; and let me have some air.

[*TWISDEN motions to COLFORD and MARGARET to go; and as he turns to DANCY, they go out. GRAVITER also moves towards the door. The GENERAL sits motionless. GRAVITER goes out.*

TWISDEN. Well?

DANCY. I'm going home, to clear up things with my wife. General Canynge, I don't quite know why I did the damned thing. But I did, and there's an end of it.

CANYNGE. Dancy, for the honour of the Army, avoid further scandal if you can. I've written a letter to a friend of mine in the Spanish War Office. It will get you a job in their war. [*CANYNGE closes the envelope.*

DANCY. Very good of you. I don't know if I can make use of it.

[*CANYNGE stretches out the letter, which TWISDEN hands to DANCY, who takes it. GRAVITER reopens the door.*

TWISDEN. What is it?

GRAVITER. De Levis is here.

TWISDEN. De Levis? Can't see him.

DANCY. Let him in!

[*After a moment's hesitation TWISDEN nods, and GRAVITER goes out. The three wait in silence with their eyes fixed on the door, the GENERAL sitting at the table, TWISDEN by his chair, DANCY between him and the door Right. DE LEVIS comes in and shuts the door. He is advancing towards TWISDEN when his eyes fall on DANCY, and he stops.*

TWISDEN. You wanted to see me?

DE LEVIS. [*Moistening his lips*] Yes. I came to say that—that I overheard—I am afraid a warrant is to be issued. I wanted you to realize—it's not *my* doing. I'll give it no support. I'm content. I don't want my money. I don't even want costs. Dancy, do you understand?

[*DANCY does not answer, but looks at him with nothing alive in his face but his eyes.*

TWISDEN. We are obliged to you, sir. It was good of you to come.

DE LEVIS. [*With a sort of darting pride*] Don't mistake me. I didn't come because I feel Christian; I am a Jew. I will take no money—not even that which was stolen. Give it to a charity. I'm proved right. And now I'm done with the damned thing. Good morning!

[*He makes a little bow to CANYNGE and TWISDEN, and turns to face DANCY, who has never moved. The two stand motionless, looking at each other, then DE LEVIS shrugs his shoulders and walks out. When he is gone there is a silence.*]

CANYNGE. [*Suddenly*] You heard what he said, Dancy. You have no time to lose. [*But DANCY does not stir.*]

TWISDEN. Captain Dancy?

[*Slowly, without turning his head, rather like a man in a dream, DANCY walks across the room, and goes out.*]

The curtain falls.

SCENE III

The DANCYS' sitting-room a few minutes later.

[*MABEL DANCY is sitting alone on the sofa with a newspaper on her lap; she is only just up, and has a bottle of smelling-salts in her hand. Two or three other newspapers are dumped on the arm of the sofa. She topples the one off her lap and takes up another as if she couldn't keep away from them; drops it in turn, and sits staring before her, sniffing at the salts. The door, Right, is opened and DANCY comes in.*]

MABEL. [*Utterly surprised*] Ronny! Do they want me in Court?

DANCY. No.

MABEL. What is it, then? Why are you back?

DANCY. Spun.

MABEL. [*Blank*] Spun? What do you mean? What's spun?

DANCY. The case. They've found out through those notes.

MABEL. Oh! [*Staring at his face.*] Who?

DANCY. Me!

MABEL. [*After a moment of horrified stillness*] Don't, Ronny! Oh, No! Don't! [*She buries her face in the pillows of the sofa.*]

[DANCY stands looking down at her.]

DANCY. Pity you wouldn't come to Africa three months ago.

MABEL. Why didn't you tell me then? I would have gone.

DANCY. You wanted this case. Well, it's fallen down.

MABEL. Oh! Why didn't I face it? But I couldn't—I had to believe.

DANCY. And now you can't. It's the end, Mabel.

MABEL. [*Looking up at him*] No.

[DANCY goes suddenly on his knees and seizes her hand]

DANCY. Forgive me!

MABEL. [*Putting her hand on his head*] Yes; oh, yes! I think I've known a long time, really. Only—why? What made you?

DANCY. [*Getting up and speaking in jerks*] It was a crazy thing to do; but, damn it, I was only looting a looter. The money was as much mine as his. A decent chap would have offered me half. You didn't see the brute look at me that night at dinner as much as to say: "You blasted fool!" It made me mad. That wasn't a bad jump—twice over. Nothing in the war took quite such nerve. [*Grimly*] I rather enjoyed that evening.

MABEL. But—money! To keep it!

DANCY. [*Sullenly*] Yes, but I had a debt to pay.

MABEL. To a woman!

DANCY. A debt of honour—it wouldn't wait.

MABEL. It was—it *was* to a woman. Ronny, don't lie any more.

DANCY. [*Grimly*] Well! I wanted to save your knowing. I'd promised a thousand. I had a letter from her father that morning, threatening to tell you. All the same, if that tyke hadn't jeered at me for parlour tricks!—But what's the good of

all this now? [*Sullenly*] Well—it may cure you of loving me. Get over that, Mab; I never was worth it—and I'm done for!

MABEL. The woman—have you—since——?

DANCY. [*Energetically*] No! You supplanted her. But if you'd known I was leaving a woman for you, you'd never have married me. [*He walks over to the hearth.*]

[*MABEL too gets up. She presses her hands to her forehead, then walks blindly round to behind the sofa and stands looking straight in front of her.*]

MABEL. [*Coldly*] What has happened, exactly?

DANCY. Sir Frederic chucked up the case. I've seen Twisden; they want me to run for it to Morocco.

MABEL. To the war there?

DANCY. Yes. There's to be a warrant out.

MABEL. A prosecution? Prison? Oh, go! Don't wait a minute! Go!

DANCY. Blast them!

MABEL. Oh, Ronny! Please! Please! Think what you'll want. I'll pack. Quick! No! Don't wait to take things. Have you got money?

DANCY. [*Nodding*] This'll be good-bye, then!

MABEL. [*After a moment's struggle*] Oh! No! No, no! I'll follow—I'll come out to you there.

DANCY. D'you mean you'll stick to me?

MABEL. Of course I'll stick to you.

[*DANCY seizes her hand and puts it to his lips. The bell rings.*]

MABEL. [*In terror*] Who's that? [*The bell rings again.*]

DANCY moves towards the door.] No! Let me!

[*She passes him and steals out to the outer door of the flat, where she stands listening. The bell rings again. She looks through the slit of the letter-box. While she is gone DANCY stands quite still, till she comes back.*]

MABEL. Through the letter-box—I can see—— It's—it's police. Oh! God! . . . Ronny! I can't bear it.

DANCY. Heads up, Mab! Don't show the brutes!

MABEL. Whatever happens, I'll go on loving you. If it's

prison—I'll wait. Do you understand? I don't care what you did—I don't care! I'm just the same. I will be just the same when you come back to me.

DANCY. [*Slowly*] That's not in human nature.

MABEL. It is. It's in *me*.

DANCY. I've crocked up your life.

MABEL. No, no! Kiss me!

[*A long kiss, till the bell again startles them apart, and there is a loud knock.*]

DANCY. They'll break the door in. It's no good—we must open. Hold them in check a little. I want a minute or two.

MABEL. [*Clasping him*] Ronny! Oh, Ronny! It won't be for long—I'll be waiting! I'll be waiting—I swear it.

DANCY. Steady, Mab! [*Putting her back from him.*] Now! [*He opens the bedroom door, Left, and stands waiting for her to go. Summoning up her courage, she goes to open the outer door. A sudden change comes over DANCY's face; from being stony it grows almost maniacal.*]

DANCY. [*Under his breath*] No! No! By God! No!

[*He goes out into the bedroom, closing the door behind him.*]

[*MABEL has now opened the outer door, and disclosed INSPECTOR DEDE and the YOUNG CONSTABLE who were summoned to Meldon Court on the night of the theft, and have been witnesses in the case. Their voices are heard.*]

MABEL. Yes?

INSPECTOR. Captain Dancy in, madam?

MABEL. I am not quite sure—I don't think so.

INSPECTOR. I wish to speak to him a minute. Stay here, Grover. Now, madam!

MABEL. Will you come in while I see?

[*She comes in, followed by the INSPECTOR.*]

INSPECTOR. I should think you must be sure, madam. This is not a big place.

MABEL. He was changing his clothes to go out. I think he has gone.

INSPECTOR. What's that door?

MABEL. To our bedroom.

INSPECTOR. [*Moving towards it*] He'll be in there, then.

MABEL. What do you want, Inspector?

INSPECTOR. [*Melting*] Well, madam, it's no use disguising it. I'm exceedingly sorry, but I've a warrant for his arrest.

MABEL. Inspector!

INSPECTOR. I'm sure I've every sympathy for you, madam; but I must carry out my instructions.

MABEL. And break my heart?

INSPECTOR. Well, madam, we're—we're not allowed to take that into consideration. The Law's the Law.

MABEL. Are you married?

INSPECTOR. I am.

MABEL. If you—your wife—— [*The INSPECTOR raises his hand, deprecating.*] [*Speaking low*] Just half an hour! Couldn't you? It's two lives—two whole lives! We've only been married four months. Come back in half an hour. It's such a little thing—nobody will know. Nobody. Won't you?

INSPECTOR. Now, madam—you must know my duty.

MABEL. Inspector, I beseech you—just half an hour.

INSPECTOR. No, no—don't you try to undermine me—I'm sorry for you; but don't you try it!

[*He tries the handle, then knocks at the door.*]

DANCY'S VOICE. One minute!

INSPECTOR. It's locked. [*Sharply*] Is there another door to that room? Come, now! [*The bell rings.*] [*Moving towards the door, Left; to the CONSTABLE*] Who's that out there?

CONSTABLE. A lady and gentleman, sir.

INSPECTOR. What lady and—— Stand by, Grover!

DANCY'S VOICE. All right! You can come in now.

[*There is the noise of a lock being turned. And almost immediately the sound of a pistol shot in the bedroom. MABEL rushes to the door, tears it open, and disappears within, followed by the INSPECTOR, just as MARGARET ORME and COLFORD come in from the passage, pursued by the CONSTABLE. They, too, all hurry to the bedroom door and disappear for a moment; then COLFORD*]

and MARGARET reappear, supporting MABEL, who faints as they lay her on the sofa. COLFORD takes from her hand an envelope, and tears it open.

COLFORD. It's addressed to me.

[He reads it aloud to MARGARET in a low voice.]

"DEAR COLFORD.—This is the only decent thing I can do. It's too damned unfair to her. It's only another jump. A pistol keeps faith. Look after her, Colford—my love to her, and you."

[MARGARET gives a sort of choking sob, then, seeing the smelling bottle, she snatches it up, and turns to revive MABEL.]

COLFORD. Leave her! The longer she's unconscious, the better.

INSPECTOR. [Re-entering] This is a very serious business, sir.

COLFORD. [Sternly] Yes, Inspector; you've done for my best friend.

INSPECTOR. I, sir? He shot himself.

COLFORD. Hara-kiri.

INSPECTOR. Beg pardon?

COLFORD. [He points with the letter to MABEL] For her sake, and his own.

INSPECTOR. [Putting out his hand] I'll want that, sir.

COLFORD. [Grimly] You shall have it read at the inquest. Till then—it's addressed to me, and I stick to it.

INSPECTOR. Very well, sir. Do you want to have a look at him?

[COLFORD passes quickly into the bedroom, followed by the INSPECTOR. MARGARET remains kneeling beside MABEL.]

[COLFORD comes quickly back. MARGARET looks up at him. He stands very still.]

COLFORD. Neatly—through the heart.

MARGARET. [Wildly] Keeps faith! We've all done that. It's not enough.

COLFORD. [Looking down at MABEL] All right, old boy!

The curtain falls.

WINDOWS

CAST OF THE ORIGINAL PRODUCTION BY
LEON M. LION AND J. T. GREIN, AT THE
ROYAL COURT THEATRE, LONDON,
APRIL 25, 1922

GEOFFREY MARCH	.	.	.	.	<i>Herbert Marshall</i>
JOAN MARCH	.	.	.	.	<i>Irene Rooke</i>
MARY MARCH	.	.	.	.	<i>Janet Eccles</i>
JOHNNY MARCH	.	.	.	.	<i>John Howell</i>
COOK	.	.	.	.	<i>Clare Greet</i>
MR. BLY	.	.	.	.	<i>Ernest Thesiger</i>
FAITH	.	.	.	.	<i>Mary Odette</i>
BLUNTER	.	.	.	.	<i>Leslie Banks</i>
MR. BARNABAS	.	.	.	.	<i>C. R. Norris</i>

ACT I

The MARCH's dining-room opens through French windows on one of those gardens which seem infinite, till they are seen to be coterminous with the side walls of the house, and finite at the far end, because only the thick screen of acacias and sumachs prevents another house from being seen. The French and other windows form practically all the outer wall of that dining-room, and between them and the screen of trees lies the difference between the characters of MR. and MRS. MARCH, with dots and dashes of MARY and JOHNNY thrown in. For instance, it has been formalized by MRS. MARCH but the grass has not been cut by MR. MARCH, and daffodils have sprung up there, which MRS. MARCH desires for the dining-room, but of which MR. MARCH says: "For God's sake, Joan, let them grow." About half therefore are now in a bowl on the breakfast table, and the other half still in the grass, in the compromise essential to lasting domesticity. A hammock under the acacias shows that MARY lies there sometimes with her eyes on the gleam of sunlight that comes through; and a trail in the longish grass, bordered with cigarette ends, proves that JOHNNY tramps there with his eyes on the ground or the stars, according. But all this is by the way, because except for a yard or two of gravel terrace outside the windows, it is all painted on the backcloth. The MARCHES have been at breakfast, and the round table, covered with blue linen, is thick with remains, seven baskets full. The room is gifted with old oak furniture: there is a door, stage Left, Forward; a hearth, where a fire is burning, and a high fender on which one can sit, stage Right, Middle; and in the wall below the fireplace, a service hatch covered with a sliding shutter, for the passage of dishes into the adjoining pantry. Against the wall, stage Left, is an old oak dresser, and a small writing-table across the Left

Back corner. MRS. MARCH still sits behind the coffee pot, making up her daily list on tablets with a little gold pencil, fastened to her wrist. She is personable, forty-eight, trim, well-dressed, and more matter-of-fact than seems plausible. MR. MARCH is sitting in an armchair, sideways to the windows, smoking his pipe and reading his newspaper, with little explosions to which no one pays any attention, because it is his daily habit. He is a fine-looking man of fifty odd, with red-grey moustaches and hair, both of which stiver partly by nature and partly because his hands often push them up. MARY and JOHNNY are close to the fireplace, stage Right. JOHNNY sits on the fender, smoking a cigarette and warming his back. He is a commonplace-looking young man, with a decided jaw, tall, neat, soulful, who has been in the war and writes poetry. MARY is less ordinary; you cannot tell exactly what is the matter with her. She too is tall, a little absent, fair, and well-looking. She has a small china dog in her hand, taken from the mantelpiece, and faces the audience. As the curtain rises she is saying in her soft and pleasant voice: "Well, what is the matter with us all, Johnny?"

JOHNNY. Stuck, as we were in the trenches—like china dogs.
[*He points to the ornament in her hand.*]

MR. MARCH. [*Into his newspaper*] Damn these people!

MARY. If there isn't an ideal left, Johnny, it's no good pretending one.

JOHNNY. That's what I'm saying: Bankrupt!

MARY. What do you want?

MRS. MARCH. [*To herself*] Mutton cutlets. Johnny, will you be in to lunch? [*JOHNNY shakes his head.*] Mary? [*MARY nods.*] Geof?

MR. MARCH. [*Into his paper*] Swine!

MRS. MARCH. That'll be three. [*To herself*] Spinach.

JOHNNY. If you'd just missed being killed for three blooming years for no spiritual result whatever, you'd want something to bite on, Mary.

MRS. MARCH. [*Jotting*] Soap.

JOHNNY. What price the little and weak, now? Freedom and self-determination, and all that?

MARY. Forty to one—no takers.

JOHNNY. It doesn't seem to worry *you*.

MARY. Well, what's the good?

JOHNNY. Oh, you're a looker-on, Mary.

MR. MARCH. [*To his newspaper*] Of all God-forsaken time-servers! [*MARY is moved so far as to turn and look over his shoulder a minute.*]

JOHNNY. Who?

MARY. Only the Old-Un.

MR. MARCH. This is absolutely Prussian.

MRS. MARCH. Soup, lobster, chicken salad. Go to Mrs. Hunt's.

MR. MARCH. And this fellow hasn't the nous to see that if ever there were a moment when it would pay us to take risks, and be generous—My hat! He ought to be—knighted!

[*Resumes his paper.*]

JOHNNY. [*Muttering*] You see, even Dad can't suggest chivalry without talking of payment for it. That shows how we've sunk.

MARY. [*Contemptuously*] Chivalry! Pouf! Chivalry was "off" even before the war, Johnny. Who wants chivalry?

JOHNNY. Of all shallow-pated humbug—that sneering at chivalry's the worst. Civilization—such as we've got—is built on it.

MARY. [*Airily*] Then it's built on sand.

[*She sits beside him on the fender.*]

JOHNNY. Sneering and smartness! Pah!

MARY. [*Roused*] I'll tell you what, Johnny, it's mucking about with chivalry that makes your poetry rotten. [*JOHNNY seizes her arm and twists it.*] Shut up—that hurts. [*JOHNNY twists it more.*] You brute! [*JOHNNY lets her arm go.*]

JOHNNY. Ha! So you don't mind taking advantage of the fact that you can check me with impunity, because you're

weaker. You've given the whole show away, Mary. Abolish chivalry and I'll make you sit up.

MRS. MARCH. What are you two quarrelling about? Will you bring home cigarettes, Johnny—not Bogdogunov's Mamelukes—something more Anglo-American.

JOHNNY. All right! D'you want any more illustrations, Mary?

MARY. Pig! [*She has risen and stands rubbing her arm and recovering her placidity, which is considerable.*]

MRS. MARCH. Geof, can you eat preserved peaches?

MR. MARCH. Hell! What a policy! Um?

MRS. MARCH. Can you eat preserved peaches?

MR. MARCH. Yes. [*To his paper*] Making the country stink in the eyes of the world!

MARY. Nostrils, Dad, nostrils.

[MR. MARCH *wriggles, half hearing.*]

JOHNNY. [*Muttering*] Shallow idiots! Thinking we can do without chivalry!

MRS. MARCH. I'm doing my best to get a parlour-maid, to-day, Mary, but these breakfast things won't clear themselves.

MARY. I'll clear them, Mother.

MRS. MARCH. Good! [*She gets up. At the door*] Knitting silk. [*She goes out.*]

JOHNNY. Mother hasn't an ounce of idealism. You might make her see stars, but never in the singular.

MR. MARCH. [*To his paper*] If God doesn't open the earth soon——

MARY. Is there anything special, Dad?

MR. MARCH. This sulphurous government. [*He drops the paper.*] Give me a match, Mary.

[*As soon as the paper is out of his hands he becomes a different—an affable man.*]

MARY. [*Giving him a match*] D'you mind writing in here this morning, Dad? Your study hasn't been done. There's nobody but Cook.

MR. MARCH. [*Lighting his pipe*] Anywhere.

[*He slews the armchair towards the fire.*]

MARY. I'll get your things, then. [*She goes out.*]

JOHNNY. [*Still on the fender*] What do you say, Dad? Is civilization built on chivalry or on self-interest?

MR. MARCH. The question is considerable, Johnny. I should say it was built on contract, and jerry-built at that.

JOHNNY. Yes; but why do we keep contracts when we can break them with advantage and impunity?

MR. MARCH. But do we keep them?

JOHNNY. Well—say we do; otherwise you'll admit there isn't such a thing as civilization at all. But *why* do we keep them? For instance, why don't we make Mary and Mother work for us like Kafir women? We could lick them into it. Why did we give women the vote? Why free slaves; why anything decent for the little and weak?

MR. MARCH. Well, you might say it was convenient for people living in communities.

JOHNNY. I don't think it's convenient at all. I should like to make Mary sweat. Why not jungle law, if there's nothing in chivalry.

MR. MARCH. Chivalry is altruism, Johnny. Of course it's quite a question whether altruism isn't enlightened self-interest!

JOHNNY. Oh! Damn!

[*The lank and shirt-sleeved figure of MR. BLY, with a pail of water and cloths, has entered, and stands near the window, Left.*]

BLY. Beg pardon, Mr. March; d'you mind me cleanin' the winders here?

MR. MARCH. Not a bit.

JOHNNY. Bankrupt of ideals. That's it!

[*MR. BLY stares at him, and puts his pail down by the window.*]

[*MARY has entered with her father's writing materials, which she puts on a stool beside him.*]

MARY. Here you are, Dad! I've filled up the ink-pot. Do be careful! Come on, Johnny!

[*She looks curiously at MR. BLY, who has begun operations at the bottom of the left-hand window, and goes, followed by JOHNNY.*

MR. MARCH. [*Relighting his pipe and preparing his materials*] What do you think of things, Mr. Bly?

BLY. Not much, sir.

MR. MARCH. Ah! [*He looks up at MR. BLY, struck by his large philosophical eyes and moth-eaten moustache.*] Nor I.

BLY. I rather thought that, sir, from your writin's.

MR. MARCH. Oh! Do you read?

BLY. I was at sea, once—formed the 'abit.

MR. MARCH. Read any of my novels?

BLY. Not to say all through—I've read some of your articles in the Sunday papers, though. Make you think!

MR. MARCH. I'm at sea now—don't see dry land anywhere, Mr. Bly.

BLY. [*With a smile*] That's right.

MR. MARCH. D'you find that the general impression?

BLY. No. People *don't* think. You 'ave to 'ave some cause for thought.

MR. MARCH. Cause enough in the papers.

BLY. It's nearer 'ome with me. I've often thought I'd like a talk with you, sir. But I'm keepin' you.

[*He prepares to swab the pane.*

MR. MARCH. Not at all. I enjoy it. Anything to put off work.

BLY. [*Looking at MR. MARCH, then giving a wipe at the window*] What's drink to one is drought to another. I've seen two men take a drink out of the same can—one die of it and the other get off with a pain in his stomach.

MR. MARCH. You've seen a lot, I expect.

BLY. Ah! I've been on the beach in my day. [*He sponges at the window.*] It's given me a way o' lookin' at things that I don't find in other people. Look at the 'Ome Office. *They* got no philosophy.

MR. MARCH. [*Pricking his ears*] What? Have you had dealings with them?

BLY. Over the reprieve that was got up for my daughter. But I'm keepin' you. [*He swabs at the window, but always at the same pane, so that he does not advance at all.*]

MR. MARCH. Reprieve?

BLY. Ah! She was famous at eighteen. The *Sunday Mercury* was full of her, when she was in prison.

MR. MARCH. [*Delicately*] Dear me! I'd no idea.

BLY. She's out now; been out a fortnight. I always say that fame's ephemereal. But she'll never settle to that weavin'. Her head got turned a bit.

MR. MARCH. I'm afraid I'm in the dark, Mr. Bly.

BLY. [*Pausing—dipping his sponge in the pail and then standing with it in his hand*] Why! Don't you remember the Bly case? They sentenced 'er to be 'anged by the neck until she was dead, for smotherin' her baby. She was only eighteen at the time of speakin'.

MR. MARCH. Oh! yes! An inhuman business!

BLY. Ah! The jury recommended 'er to mercy. So they reduced it to Life.

MR. MARCH. Life! Sweet Heaven!

BLY. That's what I said; so they give her two years. I don't hold with the *Sunday Mercury*, but it put *that* over. It's a misfortune to a girl to be good-lookin'.

MR. MARCH. [*Rumpling his hair*] No, no! Dash it all! Beauty's the only thing left worth living for.

BLY. Well, I like to see green grass and a blue sky; but it's a mistake in a 'uman bein'. Look at any young chap that's good-lookin'—'e's doomed to the screen, or hair-dressin'. Same with the girls. My girl went into an 'airdresser's at seventeen and in six months she was in trouble. When I saw 'er with a rope round her neck, as you might say, I said to meself: "Bly," I said, "you're responsible for this—If she 'adn't been good-lookin'—it'd never 'ave 'appened."

[*During this speech MARY has come in with a tray, to clear the breakfast, and stands unnoticed at the dining-table, arrested by the curious words of MR. BLY.*]

MR. MARCH. Your wife might not have thought that you were wholly the cause, Mr. Bly.

BLY. Ah! My wife. She's passed on. But Faith—that's my girl's name—she never was like 'er mother; there's no 'eredity in 'er on that side.

MR. MARCH. What sort of girl is she?

BLY. One for colour—likes a bit o' music—likes a dance, and a flower.

MARY. [*Interrupting softly*] Dad, I was going to clear, but I'll come back later.

MR. MARCH. Come here and listen to this! Here's a story to get your blood up! How old was the baby, Mr. Bly?

BLY. Two days—'ardly worth mentionin'. They say she 'ad the 'ighstrikes after—an' when she comes to she says: "I've saved my baby's life." An' that's true enough when you come to think what that sort o' baby goes through as a rule; dragged up by somebody else's hand, or took away by the Law. What can a workin' girl do with a baby born under the rose, as they call it? Wonderful the difference money makes when it come to bein' outside the Law.

MR. MARCH. Right you are, Mr. Bly. God's on the side of the big battalions.

BLY. Ah! Religion! [*His eyes roll philosophically.*] Did you ever read 'Aigel?

MR. MARCH. Hegel, or Hackel?

BLY. Yes; with an aitch. There's a balance abart 'im that I like. There's no doubt the Christian religion went too far. Turn the other cheek! What oh! An' this Anti-Christ, Neesha, what came in with the war—he went too far in the other direction. Neither of 'em practical men. You've got to strike a balance, and foller it.

MR. MARCH. Balance! Not much balance about us. We just run about and jump Jim Crow.

BLY. [*With a perfunctory wipe*] That's right; we 'aven't got a faith these days. But what's the use of tellin' the Englishman to act like an angel. He ain't either an angel or a flond

beast. He's between the two, an 'ermumphradite. Take my daughter—— If I was a blond beast, I'd turn 'er out to starve; if I was an angel, I'd starve meself to learn her the piano. I don't do either. Why? Becos my instincts tells me not.

MR. MARCH. Yes, but my doubt is whether our instincts at this moment of the world's history are leading us up or down.

BLY. What is up and what is down? Can you answer me that? Is it up or down to get so soft that you can't take care of yourself?

MR. MARCH. Down.

BLY. Well, is it up or down to get so 'ard that you can't take care of others?

MR. MARCH. Down.

BLY. Well, there you are!

MR. MARCH. Then our instincts are taking us down?

BLY. Nao. They're strikin' a balance, unbeknownst, all the time.

MR. MARCH. You're a philosopher, Mr. Bly.

BLY. [*Modestly*] Well, I do a bit in that line, too. In my opinion Nature made the individual believe he's goin' to live after 'e's dead just to keep 'im livin' while 'e's alive—otherwise he'd 'a died out.

MR. MARCH. Quite a thought—quite a thought!

BLY. But I go one better with Nature. Follow your instincts is my motto.

MR. MARCH. Excuse me, Mr. Bly, I think Nature got hold of that before you.

BLY. [*Slightly chilled*] Well, I'm keepin' you.

MR. MARCH. Not at all. You're a believer in conscience, or the little voice within. When my son was very small, his mother asked him once if he didn't hear a little voice within, telling him what was right. [MR. MARCH *touches his diaphragm.*] And he said: "I often hear little voices in here, but they never *say* anything." [MR. BLY *cannot laugh, but he smiles.*] Mary, Johnny must have been awfully like the Government.

BLY. As a matter of fact, I've got my daughter here—in obedience.

MR. MARCH. Where? I didn't catch.

BLY. In the kitchen. Your Cook told me you couldn't get hold of an 'ouse parlour-maid. So I thought it was just a chance—you bein' broad-minded.

MR. MARCH. Oh! I see. What would your mother say, Mary?

MARY. Mother would say: "Has she had experience?"

BLY. I've told you about her experience.

MR. MARCH. Yes, but—as a parlour-maid.

BLY. Well! She can do hair. [*Observing the smile exchanged between MR. MARCH and MARY.*] And she's quite handy with a plate.

MR. MARCH. [*Tentatively*] I'm a little afraid my wife would feel——

BLY. You see, in this weavin' shop—all the girls 'ave 'ad to be in trouble, otherwise they wouldn't take 'em. [*Apologetically towards MARY.*] It's a kind of a disorderly 'ouse without the disorders. Excusin' the young lady's presence.

MARY. Oh! You needn't mind me, Mr. Bly.

MR. MARCH. And so you want her to come here? H'm!

BLY. Well, I remember when she was a little bit of a thing—no higher than my knee—— [*He holds out his hand.*]

MR. MARCH. [*Suddenly moved*] My God! yes. They've all been that. [*To MARY*] Where's your mother?

MARY. Gone to Mrs. Hunt's. Suppose she's engaged one, Dad?

MR. MARCH. Well, it's only a month's wages.

MARY. [*Softly*] She won't like it.

MR. MARCH. Well, let's see her, Mr. Bly; let's see her, if you don't mind.

BLY. Oh, I don't mind, sir, and she won't neither; she's used to bein' inspected by now. Why! she 'ad her bumps gone over just before she came out!

MR. MARCH. [*Touched on the raw again*] H'm! Too bad!

Mary, go and fetch her. [MARY, with a doubting smile, goes out.] [Rising] You might give me the details of that trial, Mr. Bly. I'll see if I can't write something that'll make people sit up. *That's* the way to send Youth to hell! How can a child who's had a rope round her neck——!

BLY. [*Who has been fumbling in his pocket, produces some yellow paper-cuttings clipped together*] Here's her references—the whole literature of the case. And here's a letter from the chaplain in one of the prisons sayin' she took a lot of interest in him; a nice young man, I believe. [*He suddenly brushes a tear out of his eye with the back of his hand.*] I never thought I could 'a felt like I did over her bein' in prison. Seemed a crool senseless thing—that pretty girl o' mine. All over a baby that hadn't got used to bein' alive. 'Tain't as if she'd been follerin' her instincts; why, she missed that baby something crool.

MR. MARCH. Of course, human life—even an infant's——

BLY. I know you've got to 'ave a close time for it. But when you come to think how they take 'uman life in Injia and Ireland, and all those other places, it seems 'ard to come down like a cartload o' bricks on a bit of a girl that's been carried away by a moment's abiration.

MR. MARCH. [*Who is reading the cuttings*] H'm! What hypocrites we are!

BLY. Ah! And 'oo can tell 'oo's the father? She never give us his name. I think the better of 'er for that.

MR. MARCH. Shake hands, Mr. Bly. So do I. [BLY wipes his hand, and MR. MARCH shakes it.] Loyalty's loyalty—especially when we men benefit by it.

BLY. That's right, sir.

[MARY has returned with FAITH BLY, who stands demure and pretty on the far side of the table, her face an embodiment of the pathetic watchful prison faculty of adapting itself to whatever may be best for its owner at the moment. At this moment it is obviously best for her to look at the ground, and yet to take in the faces of MR. MARCH and MARY without their taking her face in. A moment, for all, of considerable embarrassment.]

MR. MARCH. [*Suddenly*] Well, here we are! [*The remark attracts FAITH; she raises her eyes to his softly with a little smile, and drops them again.*] So you want to be our parlour-maid?

FAITH. Yes, please.

MR. MARCH. Well, Faith can remove mountains; but—er—I don't know if she can clear tables.

BLY. I've been tellin' Mr. March and the young lady what you're capable of. Show 'em what you can do with a plate.

[*FAITH takes the tray from the sideboard and begins to clear the table, mainly by the light of nature. After a glance, MR. MARCH looks out of the window and drums his fingers on the uncleaned pane. MR. BLY goes on with his cleaning. MARY, after watching from the hearth, goes up and touches her father's arm.*

MARY. [*Between him and MR. BLY, who is bending over his bucket softly*] You're not watching, Dad.

MR. MARCH. It's too pointed.

MARY. We've got to satisfy mother.

MR. MARCH. I can satisfy her better if I don't look.

MARY. You're right.

[*FAITH has paused a moment and is watching them. As MARY turns, she resumes her operations. MARY joins, and helps her finish clearing, while the two men converse.*

BLY. Fine weather, sir, for the time of year.

MR. MARCH. It is. The trees are growing.

BLY. Ah! I wouldn't be surprised to see a change of Government before long. I've seen 'uge trees in Brazil without any roots—seen 'em come down with a crash.

MR. MARCH. Good image, Mr. Bly. Hope you're right!

BLY. Well, Governments! They're all the same—Butter when they're out of power, and blood when they're in. And Lord! 'ow they do abuse other Governments for doin' the things they do themselves. Excuse me, I'll want her dosseer back, sir, when you've done with it.

MR. MARCH. Yes, yes. [*He turns, rubbing his hands at the cleared table.*] Well, that seems all right! And you can do hair?

FAITH. Oh! Yes, I can do hair.

[*Again that little soft look, and smile so carefully adjusted.*]

MR. MARCH. That's important, don't you think, Mary?

[MARY, *accustomed to candour, smiles dubiously.*] [*Brightly*]
Ah! And cleaning plate? What about that?

FAITH. Of course, if I had the opportunity——

MARY. You haven't—so far?

FAITH. Only tin things.

MR. MARCH. [*Feeling a certain awkwardness*] Well, I daresay we can find some for you. Can you—er—be firm on the telephone?

FAITH. Tell them you're engaged when you're not? Oh! yes.

MR. MARCH. Excellent! Let's see, Mary, what else is there?

MARY. Waiting, and house work.

MR. MARCH. Exactly.

FAITH. I'm very quick. I—I'd like to come. [*She looks down.*] I don't care for what I'm doing now. It makes you feel your position.

MARY. Aren't they nice to you?

FAITH. Oh! yes—kind; but— [*She looks up.*] It's against my instincts.

MR. MARCH. Oh! [*Quizzically*] You've got a disciple, Mr. Bly.

BLY. [*Rolling his eyes at his daughter*] Ah! but you mustn't 'ave instincts here, you know. You've got a chance, and you must come to stay, and do yourself credit.

FAITH. [*Adapting her face*] Yes, I know, I'm very lucky.

MR. MARCH. [*Deprecating thanks and moral precept*] That's all right! Only, Mr. Bly, I can't absolutely answer for Mrs. March. She may think——

MARY. There is Mother; I heard the door.

BLY. [*Taking up his pail*] I quite understand, sir; I've been a married man myself. It's very queer the way women look at things. I'll take her away now, and come back presently and

do these other winders. You can talk it over by yourselves. But if you do see your way, sir, I shan't forget it in an 'urry. To 'ave the responsibility of her—really, it's dreadful.

[FAITH's face has grown sullen during this speech, but it clears up in another little soft look at MR. MARCH, as she and MR. BLY go out.]

MR. MARCH. Well, Mary, have I done it?

MARY. You have, Dad.

MR. MARCH. [*Running his hands through his hair*] Pathetic little figure! Such infernal inhumanity!

MARY. How are you going to put it to mother?

MR. MARCH. Tell her the story, and pitch it strong.

MARY. Mother's not impulsive.

MR. MARCH. We *must* tell her, or she'll think me mad.

MARY. She'll do that, anyway, dear.

MR. MARCH. Here she is! Stand by!

[*He runs his arm through MARY's, and they sit on the fender, at bay.* MRS. MARCH enters, Left.]

MR. MARCH. Well, what luck?

MRS. MARCH. None.

MR. MARCH. [*Unguardedly*] Good!

MRS. MARCH. What?

MR. MARCH. [*Cheerfully*] Well, the fact is, Mary and I have caught one for you; Mr. Bly's daughter——

MRS. MARCH. Are you out of your senses? Don't you know that she's the girl who——

MR. MARCH. That's it. She want's a lift.

MRS. MARCH. Geof!

MR. MARCH. Well, don't we want a maid?

MRS. MARCH. [*Ineffably*] Ridiculous!

MR. MARCH. We tested her, didn't we, Mary?

MRS. MARCH. [*Crossing to the bell, and ringing*] You'll just send for Mr. Bly and get rid of her again.

MR. MARCH. Joan, if we comfortable people can't put ourselves a little out of the way to give a helping hand——

MRS. MARCH. To girls who smother their babies?

MR. MARCH. Joan, I revolt. I won't be a hypocrite and a Pharisee.

MRS. MARCH. Well, for goodness sake let *me* be one.

MARY. [*As the door opens*] Here's Cook! [Cook stands—*sixty, stout, and comfortable—with a crumpled smile.*

COOK. Did you ring, ma'am?

MR. MARCH. We're in a moral difficulty, Cook, so naturally we come to you. [Cook *beams.*

MRS. MARCH. [*Impatiently*] Nothing of the sort, Cook; it's a question of common sense.

COOK. Yes, ma'am.

MRS. MARCH. That girl, Faith Bly, wants to come here as parlour-maid. Absurd!

MR. MARCH. You know her story, Cook? I want to give the poor girl a chance. Mrs. March thinks it's *taking* chances. What do you say?

COOK. Of course, it is a risk, sir; but there! you've got to take 'em to get maids nowadays. If it isn't in the past, it's in the future. I daresay I could learn 'er.

MRS. MARCH. It's not her work, Cook, it's her instincts. A girl who smothered a baby that she oughtn't to have had——

MR. MARCH. [*Remonstrant*] If she hadn't had it how could she have smothered it?

COOK. [*Soothingly*] Perhaps she's repented, ma'am.

MRS. MARCH. Of course she's repented. But did you ever know repentance change anybody, Cook?

COOK. [*Smiling*] Well, generally it's a way of gettin' ready for the next.

MRS. MARCH. Exactly.

MR. MARCH. If we never get another chance *because* we repent——

COOK. I always think of Master Johnny, ma'am, and my jam; he used to repent so beautiful, dear little feller—such a conscience! I never could bear to lock it away.

MRS. MARCH. Cook, you're wandering. I'm surprised at your encouraging the idea; I really am. [Cook *plaits her hands.*

MR. MARCH. Cook's been in the family longer than I have—haven't you, Cook? [COOK beams.] She knows much more about a girl like that than we do.

COOK. We had a girl like her, I remember, in your dear mother's time, Mr. Geoffrey.

MR. MARCH. How did she turn out?

COOK. Oh! She didn't.

MRS. MARCH. There!

MR. MARCH. Well, I can't bear behaving like everybody else. Don't you think we might give her a chance, Cook?

COOK. My 'eart says yes, ma'am.

MR. MARCH. Ha!

COOK. And my 'ead says no, sir.

MRS. MARCH. Yes!

MR. MARCH. Strike your balance, Cook. [COOK involuntarily draws her joined hands sharply in upon her amplitude.] Well? . . . I didn't catch the little voice within.

COOK. Ask Master Johnny, sir; he's been in the war.

MR. MARCH. [To MARY] Get Johnny. [MARY goes out.]

MRS. MARCH. What on earth has the war to do with it?

COOK. The things he tells me, ma'am, is too wonderful for words. He's 'ad to do with prisoners and generals, every sort of 'orror.

MR. MARCH. Cook's quite right. The war destroyed all our ideals and probably created the baby.

MRS. MARCH. It didn't smother it; or condemn the girl.

MR. MARCH. [Running his hands through his hair] The more I think of that——! [He turns away.]

MRS. MARCH. [Indicating her husband] You see, Cook, that's the mood in which I have to engage a parlour-maid. What am I to do with your master?

COOK. It's an 'ealthy rage, ma'am.

MRS. MARCH. I'm tired of being the only sober person in this house.

COOK. [Reproachfully] Oh! ma'am, I never touch a drop.

MRS. MARCH. I didn't mean anything of that sort. But they do break out so.

COOK. Not Master Johnny.

MRS. MARCH. Johnny! He's the worst of all. His poetry is nothing but one long explosion.

MR. MARCH. [*Coming from the window*] I say: We ought to have faith and jump.

MRS. MARCH. If we do have Faith, we shall jump.

COOK. [*Blankly*] Of course, in the Bible they 'ad faith, and just look what it did to them!

MR. MARCH. I mean faith in human instincts, human nature, Cook.

COOK. [*Scandalized*] Oh! no, sir, *not* human nature; I never let that get the upper hand.

MR. MARCH. You talk to Mr. Bly. He's a remarkable man.

COOK. I do, sir, every fortnight when he does the kitchen windows.

MR. MARCH. Well, doesn't he impress you?

COOK. Ah! When he's got a drop o' stout in 'im—Oh! dear!

[*She smiles placidly.*

[*JOHNNY has come in.*

MR. MARCH. Well, Johnny, has Mary told you?

MRS. MARCH. [*Looking at his face*] Now, my dear boy, don't be hasty and foolish!

JOHNNY. Of course you ought to take her, Mother.

MRS. MARCH. [*Fixing him*] Have you seen her, Johnny?

JOHNNY. She's in the hall, poor little devil, waiting for her sentence.

MRS. MARCH. There are plenty of other chances, Johnny. Why on earth should we——?

JOHNNY. Mother, it's just an instance. When something comes along that takes a bit of doing—— Give it to the other chap!

MR. MARCH. Bravo, Johnny!

MRS. MARCH. [*Dryly*] Let me see, which of us will have to put up with her shortcomings—Johnny or I?

MARY. She looks quick, Mother.

MRS. MARCH. Girls pick up all sorts of things in prison. We can hardly expect her to be honest. You don't mind that, I suppose?

JOHNNY. It's a chance to make something decent out of her.

MRS. MARCH. I can't understand this passion for vicarious heroism, Johnny.

JOHNNY. Vicarious!

MRS. MARCH. Well, where do you come in? You'll make poems about the injustice of the Law. Your father will use her in a novel. She'll wear Mary's blouses, and everybody will be happy—except Cook and me.

MR. MARCH. Hang it all, Joan, you might be the Great Public itself!

MRS. MARCH. I am—get all the kicks and none of the ha'pence.

JOHNNY. We'll all help you.

MRS. MARCH. For Heaven's sake—no, Johnny!

MR. MARCH. Well, make up your mind!

MRS. MARCH. It was made up long ago.

JOHNNY. [*Gloomily*] The more I see of things the more disgusting they seem. I don't see what we're living for. All right. Chuck the girl out, and let's go rooting along with our noses in the dirt.

MR. MARCH. Steady, Johnny!

JOHNNY. Well, Dad, there was one thing anyway we learned out there—— When a chap was in a hole—to pull him out, even at a risk.

MRS. MARCH. There are people who—the moment you pull them out—jump in again.

MARY. We can't tell till we've tried, Mother.

COOK. It's wonderful the difference good food'll make, ma'am.

MRS. MARCH. Well, you're all against me. Have it your own way, and when you regret it—remember me!

MR. MARCH. We will—we will! That's settled, then. Bring her in and tell her. We'll go on to the terrace.

[He goes out through the window, followed by JOHNNY.]

MARY. *[Opening the door]* Come in, please.

[FAITH enters and stands beside COOK, close to the door. MARY goes out.]

MRS. MARCH. *[Matter-of-fact in defeat as in victory]* You want to come to us, I hear.

FAITH. Yes.

MRS. MARCH. And you don't know much?

FAITH. No.

COOK. *[Softly]* Say ma'am, dearie.

MRS. MARCH. Cook is going to do her best for you. Are you going to do yours for us?

FAITH. *[With a quick look up]* Yes—ma'am.

MRS. MARCH. Can you begin at once?

FAITH. Yes.

MRS. MARCH. Well, then, Cook will show you where things are kept, and how to lay the table and that. Your wages will be thirty until we see where we are. Every other Sunday, and Thursday afternoon. What about dresses?

FAITH. *[Looking at her dress]* I've only got this—I had it before; of course, it hasn't been worn.

MRS. MARCH. Very neat. But I meant for the house. You've no money, I suppose?

FAITH. Only one pound thirteen, ma'am.

MRS. MARCH. We shall have to find you some dresses, then. Cook will take you to-morrow to Needham's. You needn't wear a cap unless you like. Well, I hope you'll get on. I'll leave you with Cook now. *[After one look at the girl, who is standing motionless, she goes out.]*

FAITH. *[With a jerk, as if coming out of plaster of Paris]* She's never been in prison!

COOK *[Comfortably]* Well, my dear, we can't all of us go everywhere, 'owever 'ard we try! *[She is standing back to the dresser, and turns to it, opening the right-hand drawer.]*

COOK. Now, 'ere's the wine. The master likes 'is glass. And 'ere's the spirits in the tantalyzer—'t isn't ever kept locked, in case Master Johnny should bring a friend in. Have you noticed Master Johnny? [FAITH nods.] Ah! He's a dear boy; and wonderful high-principled since he's been in the war. He'll come to me sometimes and say: "Cook, we're all going to the devil!" They think 'ighly of 'im as a poet. He spoke up for you beautiful.

FAITH. Oh! He spoke up for me?

COOK. Well, of course they had to talk you over.

FAITH. I wonder if they think I've got feelings.

COOK. [*Regarding her moody, pretty face*] Why! We all have feelin's!

FAITH. Not below three hundred a year.

COOK. [*Scandalized*] Dear, dear! Where were you educated?

FAITH. I wasn't.

COOK. Tt! Well—it's wonderful what a change there is in girls since my young days. [*Pulling out a drawer.*] Here's the napkins. You change the master's every day at least because of his moustache; and the others every two days, but always clean ones Sundays. Did you keep Sundays in *there*?

FAITH. [*Smiling*] Yes. Longer chapel.

COOK. It'll be a nice change for you, here. They don't go to Church; they're agnosticals. [*Patting her shoulder.*] How old are you?

FAITH. Twenty.

COOK. Think of that—and such a life! Now, dearie, I'm your friend. Let the present bury the past—as the sayin' is. Forget all about yourself, and you'll be a different girl in no time.

FAITH. Do you want to be a different woman?

[*COOK is taken flat aback by so sudden a revelation of the pharisaism of which she has not been conscious.*]

COOK. Well! You *are* sharp! [*Opening another dresser drawer.*] Here's the vinegar! And here's the sweets, and [*rather anxiously*] you mustn't eat them.

FAITH. I wasn't in for theft.

COOK. [*Shocked at such rudimentary exposure of her natural misgivings*] No, no! But girls have appetites.

FAITH. They didn't get much chance where I've been.

COOK. Ah! You must tell me all about it. Did you have adventures?

FAITH. There isn't such a thing in a prison.

COOK. You don't say! Why, in the books they're escapin' all the time. But books is books; I've always said so. How were the men?

FAITH. Never saw a man—only a chaplain.

COOK. Dear, dear! They must be quite fresh to you, then! How long was it?

FAITH. Two years.

COOK. And never a day out? What did you do all the time? Did they learn you anything?

FAITH. Weaving. That's why I hate it.

COOK. Tell me about your poor little baby. I'm sure you meant it for the best.

FAITH. [*Sardonically*] Yes; I was afraid they'd make it a ward in Chancery.

COOK. Oh! dear—what things do come into your head! Why! No one can take a baby from its mother.

FAITH. Except the Law.

COOK. Tt! Tt! Well! Here's the pickled onions. Miss Mary loves 'em! Now then, let me see you lay the cloth. [*She takes a tablecloth out, hands it to FAITH, and while the girl begins to unfold the cloth she crosses to the service shutter.*] And here's where we pass the dishes through into the pantry. [*The door is opened, and MRS. MARCH's voice says: "Cook—a minute!"*] [*Preparing to go.*] Salt-cellars one at each corner—four, and the peppers. [*From the door.*] Now the decanters. Oh! you'll soon get on. [*MRS. MARCH: "Cook!"*] Yes, ma'am. [*She goes.*

[*FAITH, left alone, stands motionless, biting her pretty lip, her eyes mutinous. Hearing footsteps, she looks up. MR. BLY, with his pail and cloths, appears outside.*

BLY. [*Preparing to work, while FAITH prepares to set the salt-cellar*] So you've got it! You never know your luck. Up to-day and down to-morrow. I'll 'ave a glass over this to-night. What d'you get?

FAITH. Thirty.

BLY. It's not the market price; still, you're not the market article. Now, put a good heart into it and get to know your job; you'll find Cook full o' philosophy if you treat her right—she can make a dumplin' with anybody. But look 'ere; you confine yourself to the ladies!

FAITH. I don't want your advice, father.

BLY. I know parents are out of date; still, I've put up with a lot on your account, so gimme a bit of me own back.

FAITH. I don't know whether I shall like this. I've been shut up so long. I want to see some life.

BLY. Well, that's natural. But I want you to do well. I suppose you'll be comin' 'ome to fetch your things to-night?

FAITH. Yes.

BLY. I'll have a flower for you. What'd you like—daffydils?

FAITH. No; one with a scent to it.

BLY. I'll ask at Mrs. Bean's round the corner. She'll pick 'em out from what's over. Never 'ad much nose for a flower meself. I often thought you'd like a flower when you was in prison.

FAITH. [*A little touched*] Did you? Did you—really?

BLY. Ah! I suppose I've drunk more glasses over your bein' in there than over anything that ever 'appened to me. Why! I couldn't relish the war for it? And I suppose you 'ad none to relish. Well, it's over. So, put an 'cart into it.

FAITH. I'll try.

BLY. "There's compensation for everything"—'Aigel says. At least, if it wasn't 'Aigel it was one o' the others. I'll move on to the study now. Ah! He's got some winders there lookin' right over the country. And a wonderful lot o' books, if you feel inclined for a read one of these days.

COOK'S VOICE. Faith!

[FAITH sets down the salt-cellar in her hand, puts her tongue out a very little, and goes out into the hall. MR. BLY is gathering up his pail and cloths when MR. MARCH enters at the window.

MR. MARCH. So it's fixed up, Mr. Bly.

BLY. [*Raising himself*] I'd like to shake your 'and, sir. [*They shake hands.*] It's a great weight off my mind.

MR. MARCH. It's rather a weight on my wife's, I'm afraid. But we must hope for the best. The country wants rain, but—I doubt if we shall get it with this Government.

BLY. Ah! We want the good old times—when you could depend on the seasons. The further you look back the more dependable the times get; 'ave you noticed that, sir?

MR. MARCH. [*Suddenly*] Suppose they'd hanged your daughter, Mr. Bly. What would you have done?

BLY. Well, to be quite frank, I should 'ave got drunk on it.

MR. MARCH. Public opinion's always in advance of the Law. I think your daughter's a most pathetic little figure.

BLY. Her looks *are* against her. I never found a man that didn't.

MR. MARCH. [*A little disconcerted*] Well, we'll try and give her a good show here.

BLY. [*Taking up his pail*] I'm greatly obliged; she'll appreciate anything you can do for her. [*He moves to the door and pauses there to say:*] Fact is—her winders wants cleanin', she 'ad a dusty time in there.

MR. MARCH. I'm sure she had.

[MR. BLY passes out, and MR. MARCH busies himself in gathering up his writing things preparatory to seeking his study. While he is so engaged FAITH comes in. Glancing at him, she resumes her placing of the decanters, as JOHNNY enters by the window, and comes down to his futher by the hearth.

JOHNNY. [*Privately*] If you haven't begun your morning, Dad, you might just tell me what you think of these verses.

[*He puts a sheet of notepaper before his father, who takes it and begins to con over the verses thereon, while JOHNNY looks carefully at his nails.*

MR. MARCH. Er—I—I like the last line awfully, Johnny.

JOHNNY. [*Gloomily*] What about the other eleven?

MR. MARCH. [*Tentatively*] Well—old man, I—er—think perhaps it'd be stronger if they were out.

JOHNNY. Good God!

[*He takes back the sheet of paper, clutches his brow, and crosses to the door. As he passes FAITH, she looks up at him with eyes full of expression. JOHNNY catches the look, jibs ever so little, and goes out.*

COOK'S VOICE. [*Through the door, which is still ajar*] Faith!

[*FAITH puts the decanters on the table, and goes quickly out.*

MR. MARCH. [*Who has seen this little by-play—to himself—in a voice of dismay*] Oh! oh! I wonder!

The curtain falls.

ACT II

A fortnight later in the MARCH'S dining-room; a day of violent April showers. Lunch is over and the table littered with remains—twelve baskets full.

[MR. MARCH and MARY have lingered. MR. MARCH is standing by the hearth where a fire is burning, filling a fountain pen. MARY sits at the table opposite, pecking at a walnut.

MR. MARCH. [*Examining his fingers*] What it is to have an inky present! Suffer with me, Mary!

MARY. "Weep ye no more, sad Fountains!
Why need ye flow so fast?"

MR. MARCH. [*Pocketing his pen*] Coming with me to the British Museum? I want to have a look at the Assyrian reliefs.

MARY. Dad, have you noticed Johnny?

MR. MARCH. I have.

MARY. Then only Mother hasn't.

MR. MARCH. I've always found your mother extremely good at seeming not to notice things, Mary.

MARY. Faith! She's got on very fast this fortnight.

MR. MARCH. The glad eye, Mary. I got it that first morning.

MARY. *You*, Dad?

MR. MARCH. No, no! Johnny got it, and I got him getting it.

MARY. What are you going to do about it?

MR. MARCH. What *does* one do with a glad eye that belongs to some one else?

MARY. [*Laughing*] No. But, seriously, Dad, Johnny's not like you and me. Why not speak to Mr. Bly?

MR. MARCH. Mr. Bly's eyes are not glad.

MARY. Dad! Do be serious! Johnny's capable of anything except a sense of humour.

MR. MARCH. The girl's past makes it impossible to say anything to her.

MARY. Well, I warn you. Johnny's very queer just now; he's in the "lose the world to save your soul" mood. It really is *too* bad of that girl. After all, we did what most people wouldn't.

MR. MARCH. Come! Get your hat on, Mary, or we shan't make the Tube before the next shower.

MARY. [*Going to the door*] Something must be done.

MR. MARCH. As you say, something—— Ah! Mr. Bly!

[MR. BLY, *in precisely the same case as a fortnight ago, with his pail and cloths, is coming in.*

BLY. Afternoon, sir! Shall I be disturbing you if I do the winders here?

MR. MARCH. Not at all. [MR. BLY *crosses to the windows.*

MARY. [*Pointing to MR. BLY's back*] Try!

BLY. Showery, sir.

MR. MARCH. Ah!

BLY. Very tryin' for winders. [*Resting.*] My daughter givin' satisfaction, I hope?

MR. MARCH. [*With difficulty*] Er—in her work, I believe, coming on well. But the question is, Mr. Bly, do—er—any of us ever really give satisfaction except to ourselves?

BLY. [*Taking it as an invitation to his philosophical vein*] Ah! that's one as goes to the roots of 'uman nature. There's a lot of disposition in all of us. And what I always say is: One's man's disposition is another man's indisposition.

MR. MARCH. By George! Just hits the mark.

BLY. [*Filling his sponge*] Question is: How far are you to give rein to your disposition? When I was in Durban, Natal, I knew a man who had the biggest disposition I ever come across. 'E struck 'is wife, 'e smoked opium, 'e was a liar, 'e gave all the rein 'e could, and yet withal one of the pleasantest men I ever met.

MR. MARCH. Perhaps in giving rein he didn't strike you.

BLY. [*With a big wipe, following his thought*] He said to me

once: "Joe," he said, "if I was to hold meself in, I should be a devil." There's where you get it. Policemen, priests, prisoners. Cab'net Ministers, any one who leads an unnatural life, see how it twists 'em. You can't suppress a thing without it's swellin' you up in another place.

MR. MARCH. And the moral of that is——?

BLY. Follow your instincts. You see—if I'm not keepin' you—now that we ain't got no faith, as we were sayin' the other day, no Ten Commandments in black an' white—we've just got to be 'uman bein's—raisin' Cain, and havin' feelin' hearts. What's the use of all these lofty ideas that you can't live up to? Liberty, Fraternity, Equality, Democracy—see what comes o' fightin' for 'em! 'Ere we are—wipin' out the lot. We thought they was fixed stars; they was only comets—hot air. No; trust 'uman nature, I say, and follow your instincts.

MR. MARCH. We were talking of your daughter—I—

BLY. There's a case in point. Her instincts was starved goin' on for three years, because, mind you, they kept her hangin' about in prison months before they tried her. I read your article, and I thought to meself after I'd finished: Which would I feel smallest—if I was—the Judge, the Jury, or the 'Ome Secretary? It *was* a treat, that article! They ought to abolish that in'uman "To be hanged by the neck until she is dead." It's my belief they only keep it because it's poetry; that and the wigs—they're hard up for a bit of beauty in the Courts of Law. Excuse my 'and, sir; I do thank you for that article.

[*He extends his wiped hand, which MR. MARCH shakes with the feeling that he is always shaking MR. BLY's hand.*]

MR. MARCH. But, apropos of your daughter, Mr. Bly. I suppose none of us ever change our natures.

BLY. [*Again responding to the appeal that he senses to his philosophical vein*] Ah! but 'oo can see what our natures are? Why, I've known people that could see nothin' but theirselves and their own families, unless they was drunk. At my daughter's trial, I see right into the lawyers, judge and all. There she was,

hub of the whole thing, and all they could see of her was 'ow far she affected 'em personally—one tryin' to get 'er guilty, the other tryin' to get 'er off, and the judge summin' 'er up cold-blooded.

MR. MARCH. But that's what they're paid for, Mr. Bly.

BLY. Ah! But which of 'em was thinkin': "'Ere's a little bit o' warm life on its own. 'Ere's a little dancin' creature. What's she feelin', wot's 'er complaint?'"—impersonal-like. I like to see a man do a bit of speculatin', with his mind off of 'imself, for once.

MR. MARCH. "The man that hath not speculation in his soul."

BLY. That's right, sir. When I see a mangy cat or a dog that's lost, or a fellow-creature down on his luck, I always try to put meself in his place. It's a weakness I've got.

MR. MARCH. [*Warmly*] A deuced good one. Shake——

[*He checks himself, but MR. BLY has wiped his hand and extended it.*

[*While the shake is in progress MARY returns, and, having seen it to a safe conclusion, speaks.*

MARY. Coming, Dad?

MR. MARCH. Excuse me, Mr. Bly, I must away.

[*He goes towards the door, and BLY dips his sponge.*

MARY. [*In a low voice*] Well?

MR. MARCH. Mr. Bly is like all the greater men I know—he can't listen.

MARY. But you were shaking——

MR. MARCH. Yes; it's a weakness we have—every three minutes.

MARY. [*Bubbling*] Dad—Silly!

MR. MARCH. Very!

[*As they go out MR. BLY pauses in his labours to catch, as it were, a philosophical reflection. He resumes the wiping of a pane, while quietly, behind him, FAITH comes in with a tray. She is dressed now in lilac-coloured linen, without a cap, and looks prettier than ever. She puts the tray down on the sideboard with a clap*

that attracts her father's attention, and stands contemplating the debris on the table.

BLY. Winders! There they are! Clean, dirty! All sorts—All round yer! Winders!

FAITH. [*With disgust*] Food!

BLY. Ah! Food and winders! That's life!

FAITH. Eight times a day—four times for them and four times for us. I hate food! [*She puts a chocolate into her mouth.*]

BLY. 'Ave some philosophy. I might just as well hate me winders.

FAITH. Well! [*She begins to clear.*]

BLY. [*Regarding her*] Look 'ere, my girl! Don't you forget that there ain't many winders in London out o' which they look as philosophical as these here. Beggars can't be choosers.

FAITH. [*Sullenly*] Oh! Don't go on at me!

BLY. They spoiled your disposition in that place, I'm afraid.

FAITH. Try it, and see what they do with yours.

BLY. Well, I may come to it yet.

FAITH. You'll get no windows to look out of there; a little bit of a thing with bars to it, and lucky if it's not thick glass. [*Standing still and gazing past Mr. BLY.*] No sun, no trees, no faces—people don't pass in the sky, not even angels.

BLY. Ah! But you shouldn't brood over it. I knew a man in Valpiraso that 'ad spent 'arf 'is life in prison—a jolly feller; I forget wha 'e'd done, somethin' bloody. I want to see you like him. Aren't you happy here?

FAITH. It's right enough, so long as I get out.

BLY. This Mr. March—he's like all these novel-writers—thinks 'e knows 'uman nature, but of course 'e don't. Still, I can talk to 'im—got an open mind, and hates the Gover'ment. That's the two great things. Mrs. March, so far as I see, 'as got her head screwed on much tighter.

FAITH. She has.

BLY. What's the young man like? He's a long feller.

FAITH. Johnny? [*With a shrug and a little smile.*] Johnny.

BLY. Well, that gives a very good idea of him. They say 'e's a poet; does 'e leave 'em about?

FAITH. I've seen one or two.

BLY. What's their tone?

FAITH. All about the condition of the world; and the moon.

BLY. Ah! Depressin'. And the young lady? [FAITH shrugs her shoulders.] Um—'ts what I thought. She 'asn't moved much with the times. She thinks she 'as, but she 'asn't. Well, they seem a pleasant family. Leave you to yourself. 'Ow's Cook?

FAITH. Not much company.

BLY. More body than mind? Still, you get out, don't you?

FAITH. [*With a slow smile*] Yes. [*She gives a sudden little twirl, and puts her hands up to her hair before the mirror.*] My afternoon, to-day. It's fine in the streets, after—being in *there*.

BLY. Well! Don't follow your instincts too much, that's all! I must get on to the drawin'-room now. There's a shower comin'. [*Philosophically*] It's 'ardly worth while to do these winders. You clean 'em, and they're dirty again in no time. It's like life. And people talk o' progress. What a sooperstition! Of course there ain't progress; it's a world-without-end affair. You've got to make up your mind to it, and not be discouraged. All this depression comes from 'avin' 'igh 'opes. 'Ave low 'opes, and you'll be all right. [*He takes up his pail and cloths and moves out through the windows.*]

[FAITH puts another chocolate into her mouth, and taking up a flower, twirls round with it held to her nose, and looks at herself in the glass over the hearth. She is still looking at herself when she sees in the mirror a reflection of JOHNNY, who has come in. Her face grows just a little scared, as if she had caught the eye of a warder peering through the peep-hole of her cell door, then brazens, and slowly sweetens as she turns round to him.]

JOHNNY. Sorry! [*He has a pipe in his hand and wears a Norfolk jacket.*] Fond of flowers?

FAITH. Yes. [*She puts back the flower.*] Ever so!

JOHNNY. Stick to it. Put it in your hair; it'll look jolly. How do you like it here?

FAITH. It's quiet.

JOHNNY. Ha! I wonder if you've got the feeling I have. We've both had hell, you know; I had three years of it out there, and you've had three years of it here. The feeling that you can't catch up; can't live fast enough to get even. [FAITH nods.] Nothing's big enough; nothing's worth while enough—is it?

FAITH. I don't know. I know I'd like to bite.

[She draws her lips back.

JOHNNY. Ah! Tell me all about your beastly time; it'll do you good. You and I are different from anybody else in this house. We've lived—they're just vegetated. Come on; tell me!

[FAITH, who up to now has looked on him as a young male, stares at him for the first time without sex in her eyes.

FAITH. I can't. We didn't talk in there, you know.

JOHNNY. Were you fond of the chap who——?

FAITH. No. Yes. I suppose I was—once.

JOHNNY. He must have been rather a swine.

FAITH. He's dead.

JOHNNY. Sorry! Oh, sorry!

FAITH. I've forgotten all that.

JOHNNY. Beastly things, babies; and absolutely unnecessary in the present state of the world.

FAITH. [With a faint smile] My baby wasn't beastly; but I—I got upset.

JOHNNY. Well, I should think so!

FAITH. My friend in the manicure came and told me about hers when I was lying in the hospital. She couldn't have it with her, so it got neglected and died.

JOHNNY. Um! I believe that's quite common.

FAITH. And she told me about another girl—the Law took her baby from her. And after she was gone, I—got all worked up—— [She hesitates, then goes swiftly on.] And I looked at mine; it was asleep just here, quite close. I just put out my arm like that, over its face—quite soft—I didn't hurt it. I didn't

really. [*She suddenly swallows, and her lips quiver.*] I didn't feel anything under my arm. And—and a beast of a nurse came on me, and said: "You've smothered your baby, you wretched girl!" I didn't want to kill it—I only wanted to save it from living. And when I looked at it, I went off screaming.

JOHNNY. I nearly screamed when I saved my first German from living. I never felt the same again. They say the human race has got to go on, but I say they've first got to prove that the human race wants to. Would you rather be alive or dead?

FAITH. Alive.

JOHNNY. But would you have in prison?

FAITH. I don't know. You can't tell anything in there. [*With sudden vehemence*] I wish I had my baby back, though. It was mine; and I—I don't like thinking about it.

JOHNNY. I know. I hate to think about anything I've killed, really. At least, I should—but it's better not to think.

FAITH. I could have killed that judge.

JOHNNY. Did he come the heavy father? That's what I can't stand. When they jaw a chap and hang him afterwards. Or was he one of the joking ones?

FAITH. I've sat in my cell and cried all night—night after night, I have. [*With a little laugh*] I cried all the softness out of me.

JOHNNY. You never believed they were going to hang you, did you?

FAITH. I didn't care if they did—not then.

JOHNNY. [*With a reflective grunt*] You had a much worse time than I. You were lonely——

FAITH. Have you been in prison, ever?

JOHNNY. No, thank God!

FAITH. It's awfully clean.

JOHNNY. You bet.

FAITH. And it's stone cold. It turns your heart.

JOHNNY. Ah! Did you ever see a stalactite?

FAITH. What's that?

JOHNNY. In caves. The water drops like tears, and each

drop has some sort of salt, and leaves it behind till there's just a long salt petrified drip hanging from the roof.

FAITH. Ah! [*Staring at him.*] I used to stand behind my door. I'd stand there sometimes I don't know how long. I'd listen and listen—the noises are all hollow in a prison. You'd think you'd get used to being shut up, but I never did. [JOHNNY utters a deep grunt.] It's awful the feeling you get here—so tight and chokey. People who are free don't know what it's like to be shut up. If I'd had a proper window even—— When you can see things living, it makes you feel alive.

JOHNNY. [*Catching her arm*] We'll make you feel alive again. [FAITH stares at him; sex comes back to her eyes. She looks down.] I bet you used to enjoy life, before.

FAITH. [*Clasping her hands*] Oh! yes, I did. And I love getting out now. I've got a fr—— [*She checks herself.*] The streets are beautiful, aren't they? Do you know Orleans Street?

JOHNNY. [*Doubtful*] No-o. . . . Where?

FAITH. At the corner out of the Regent. That's where we had our shop. I liked the hair-dressing. We had fun. Perhaps I've seen you before. Did you ever come in there?

JOHNNY. No.

FAITH. I'd go back there; only they wouldn't take me—I'm too conspicuous now.

JOHNNY. I expect you're well out of that.

FAITH. [*With a sigh*] But I did like it. I felt free. We had an hour off in the middle of the day; you could go where you liked; and then, after hours—I love the streets at night—all lighted. Olga—that's one of the other girls—and I used to walk about for hours. That's life. Fancy! I never saw a street for more than two years. Didn't you miss them in the war?

JOHNNY. I missed grass and trees more—the trees! All burnt, and splintered. Gah!

FAITH. Yes, I like trees too; anything beautiful, you know. I think the parks are lovely—but they might let you pick the flowers. But the lights are best, really—they make you feel

happy. And music—I love an organ. There was one used to come and play outside the prison—before I was tried. It sounded so far away and lovely. If I could 'ave met the man that played that organ, I'd have kissed him. D'you think he did it on purpose?

JOHNNY. He would have, if he'd been me. [*He says it unconsciously, but FAITH is instantly conscious of the implication.*]

FAITH. He'd rather have had pennies, though. It's all earning; working and earning. I wish I were like the flowers. [*She twirls the flower in her hand.*] Flowers don't work, and they don't get put in prison.

JOHNNY. [*Putting his arm round her*] Never mind! Cheer up! You're only a kid. You'll have a good time yet.

[*FAITH leans against him, as it were indifferently, clearly expecting him to kiss her, but he doesn't.*]

FAITH. When I was a little girl I had a cake covered with sugar. I ate the sugar all off and then I didn't want the cake—not much.

JOHNNY. [*Suddenly, removing his arm*] Gosh! If I could write a poem that would show everybody what was in the heart of everybody else——!

FAITH. It'd be too long for the papers, wouldn't it?

JOHNNY. It'd be too strong.

FAITH. Besides, you don't know. [*Her eyelids go up.*]

JOHNNY. [*Staring at her*] I could tell what's in you now.

FAITH. What?

JOHNNY. You feel like a flower that's been picked.

[*FAITH's smile is enigmatic.*]

FAITH. [*Suddenly*] Why do you go on about me so?

JOHNNY. Because you're weak—little and weak. [*Breaking out again.*] Damn it! We went into the war to save the little and weak; at least we *said* so; and look at us now! The bottom's out of all that. [*Bitterly*] There isn't a faith or an illusion left. Look here! I want to help you.

FAITH. [*Surprisingly*] My baby was little and weak.

JOHNNY. You never meant—— You didn't do it for your own advantage.

FAITH. It didn't know it was alive. [*Suddenly*] D'you think I'm pretty?

JOHNNY. As pie.

FAITH. Then you'd better keep away, hadn't you?

JOHNNY. Why?

FAITH. You might want a bite.

JOHNNY. Oh! I can trust myself.

FAITH. [*Turning to the window, through which can be seen the darkening of a shower*] It's raining. Father says windows never stay clean.

[*They stand close together, unaware that COOK has thrown up the service shutter, to see why the clearing takes so long. Her astounded head and shoulders pass into view just as FAITH suddenly puts up her face. JOHNNY's lips hesitate, then move towards her forehead. But her face shifts, and they find themselves upon her lips. Once there, the emphasis cannot help but be considerable. COOK's mouth falls open.*

COOK. Oh! [*She closes the shutter, vanishing.*

FAITH. What was that?

JOHNNY. Nothing. [*Breaking away.*] Look here! I didn't mean—I oughtn't to have—— Please forget it!

FAITH. [*With a little smile*] Didn't you like it?

JOHNNY. Yes—that's just it. I didn't mean to—— It won't do.

FAITH. Why not?

JOHNNY. No, no! It's just the opposite of what—— No, no! [*He goes to the door, wrenches it open and goes out.*

[*FAITH, still with that little half-mocking, half-contented smile, resumes the clearing of the table. She is interrupted by the entrance through the French windows of MR. MARCH and MARY, struggling with one small wet umbrella.*

MARY. [*Feeling his sleeve*] Go and change, Dad.

MR. MARCH. Women's shoes! We could have made the Tube but for your shoes.

MARY. It was *your* cold feet, not mine, dear. [*Looking at FAITH and nudging him.*] Now! [*She goes towards the door, turns to look at FAITH still clearing the table, and goes out.*]

MR. MARCH. [*In front of the hearth*] Nasty spring weather, Faith.

FAITH. [*Still in the mood of the kiss*] Yes, sir.

MR. MARCH. [*Sotto voce*] "In the spring a young man's fancy." I—I wanted to say something to you in a friendly way. [*FAITH regards him as he struggles on.*] Because I feel very friendly towards you.

FAITH. Yes.

MR. MARCH. So you won't take what I say in bad part?

FAITH. No.

MR. MARCH. After what you've been through, any man with a sense of chivalry—— [*FAITH gives a little shrug.*] Yes, I know—but we don't all support the Government.

FAITH. I don't know anything about the Government.

MR. MARCH. [*Side-tracked on to his hobby*] Ah! I forgot. You saw no newspapers. But you ought to pick up the threads now. What paper does Cook take?

FAITH. *Cosy.*

MR. MARCH. *Cosy*? I don't seem—— What are its politics?

FAITH. It hasn't any—only funny bits, and fashions. It's full of corsets.

MR. MARCH. What does Cook want with corsets?

FAITH. She likes to think she looks like that.

MR. MARCH. By George! Cook an idealist! Let's see!—er—I was speaking of chivalry. My son, you know—er—my son has got it.

FAITH. Badly?

MR. MARCH. [*Suddenly alive to the fact that she is playing with him*] I started by being sorry for you.

FAITH. Aren't you, any more?

MR. MARCH. Look here, my child! [*FAITH looks up at him.*] [*Protectingly*] We want to do our best for you. Now, don't spoil it by—— Well, you know!

FAITH. [*Suddenly*] Suppose you'd been stuffed away in a hole for years!

MR. MARCH. [*Side-tracked again*] Just what your father said. The more I see of Mr. Bly, the more wise I think him.

FAITH. About other people.

MR. MARCH. What sort of bringing up did he give you?

[FAITH *smiles wryly and shrugs her shoulders.*

MR. MARCH. H'm! Here comes the sun again!

FAITH. [*Taking up the flower which is lying on the table*] May I have this flower?

MR. MARCH. Of course. You can always take what flowers you like—that is—if—er——

FAITH. If Mrs. March isn't about?

MR. MARCH. I meant, if it doesn't spoil the look of the table. We must all be artists in our professions, mustn't we?

FAITH. My profession was cutting hair. I *would* like to cut yours. [MR. MARCH's *hands instinctively go up to it.*

MR. MARCH. You mightn't think it, but I'm talking to you seriously.

FAITH. I was, too.

MR. MARCH. [*Out of his depth*] Well! I got wet; I must go and change.

[FAITH *follows him with her eyes as he goes out, and resumes the clearing of the table.*

[*She has paused and is again smelling at the flower when she hears the door, and quickly resumes her work. It is MRS. MARCH, who comes in and goes to the writing-table, Left Back, without looking at FAITH. She sits there writing a cheque, while FAITH goes on clearing.*

MRS. MARCH. [*Suddenly, in an unruffled voice*] I have made your cheque out for four pounds. It's rather more than the fortnight, and a month's notice. There'll be a cab for you in an hour's time. Can you be ready by then?

FAITH. [*Astonished*] What for—ma'am?

MRS. MARCH. You don't suit.

FAITH. Why?

MRS. MARCH. Do you wish for the reason?

FAITH. [*Breathless*] Yes.

MRS. MARCH. Cook saw you just now.

FAITH. [*Blankly*] Oh! I didn't mean her to.

MRS. MARCH. Obviously.

FAITH. I—I——

MRS. MARCH. Now go and pack up your things.

FAITH. He asked me to be a friend to him. He said he was lonely here.

MRS. MARCH. Don't be ridiculous. Cook saw you kissing him with p—p——

FAITH. [*Quickly*] Not with *pep*.

MRS. MARCH. I was going to say "passion." Now, go quietly.

FAITH. Where am I to go?

MRS. MARCH. You will have four pounds, and you can get another place.

FAITH. How?

MRS. MARCH. That's hardly my affair.

FAITH. [*Tossing her head*] All right!

MRS. MARCH. I'll speak to your father, if he isn't gone.

FAITH. Why do you send me away—just for a kiss! What's a kiss?

MRS. MARCH. That will do.

FAITH. [*Desperately*] He wanted to—to save me.

MRS. MARCH. You know perfectly well people can only save themselves.

FAITH. I don't care for your son; I've got a young——
[*She checks herself.*] I—I'll leave your son alone, if he leaves me.

[*MRS. MARCH rings the bell on the table.*]

[*Desolately.*] Well? [*She moves towards the door. Suddenly holding out the flower.*] Mr. March gave me that flower; would you like it back?

MRS. MARCH. Don't be absurd! If you want more money till you get a place, let me know.

FAITH. I won't trouble you.

[*She goes out.*]

[MRS. MARCH goes to the window and drums her fingers on the pane. COOK enters.]

MRS. MARCH. Cook, if Mr. Bly's still here, I want to see him. Oh! And it's three now. Have a cab at four o'clock.

COOK. [*Almost tearful*] Oh, ma'am—anybody but Master Johnny, and I'd 'ave been a deaf an' dummy. Poor girl! She's not responsive, I daresay. Suppose I was to speak to Master Johnny?

MRS. MARCH. No, no, Cook! Where's Mr. Bly?

COOK. He's done his windows; he's just waiting for his money.

MRS. MARCH. Then get him; and take that tray.

COOK. I remember the master kissin' me when he was a boy. But then he never meant anything; so different from Master Johnny. Master Johnny takes things to 'eart.

MRS. MARCH. Just so, Cook.

COOK. There's not an ounce of vice in 'im. It's all his goodness, dear little feller.

MRS. MARCH. That's the danger, with a girl like that.

COOK. It's eatin' hearty all of a sudden that's made her popitious. But there, ma'am, try her again. Master Johnny'll be so cut up!

MRS. MARCH. No playing with fire, Cook. We were foolish to let her come.

COOK. Oh! dear, he *will* be angry with me. If you hadn't been in the kitchen and heard me, ma'am, I'd ha' let it pass.

MRS. MARCH. That would have been very wrong of you.

COOK. Ah! But I'd do a lot of wrong things for Master Johnny. There's always someone you'll go wrong for!

MRS. MARCH. Well, get Mr. Bly; and take that tray, there's a good soul.

[COOK goes out with the tray; and while waiting, MRS. MARCH finishes clearing the table. She has not quite finished when MR. BLY enters.]

BLY. Your service, ma'am!

MRS. MARCH. [*With embarrassment*] I'm very sorry, Mr. Bly, but circumstances over which I have no control——

BLY. [*With deprecation*] Ah! we all has them. The winders ought to be done once a week now the spring's on 'em.

MRS. MARCH. No, no; it's your daughter——

BLY. [*Deeply*] Not been givin' way to 'er instincts, I do trust.

MRS. MARCH. Yes. I've just had to say good-bye to her.

BLY. [*Very blank*] Nothing to do with property, I hope?

MRS. MARCH. No, no! Giddiness with my son. It's impossible; she really must learn.

BLY. Oh! but 'oo's to learn 'er? Couldn't you learn your son instead?

MRS. MARCH. No. My son is very high-minded.

BLY. [*Dubiously*] I see. How am I goin' to get over this? Shall I tell you what I think, ma'am?

MRS. MARCH. I'm afraid it'll be no good.

BLY. That's it. Character's born, not made. You can clean yer winders and clean 'em, but that don't change the colour of the glass. My father would have given her a good hidin', but I shan't. Why not? Because my glass ain't as thick as his. I see through it; I see my girl's temptations, I see what she is—likes a bit o' life, likes a flower, an' a dance. She's a'natural morganatic.

MRS. MARCH. A what?

BLY. Nothin'll ever make her regular. Mr. March'll understand how I feel. Poor girl! In the mud again. Well, we must keep smilin'. [*His face is as long as his arm.*] The poor 'ave their troubles, there's no doubt. [*He turns to go.*] There's nothin' can save her but money, so as she can do as she likes. Then she wouldn't want to do it.

MRS. MARCH. I'm very sorry, but there it is.

BLY. And I thought she was goin' to be a success here. Fact is, you can't see anything till it 'appens. There's winders all round, but you can't see. Follow your instincts—it's the only way.

MRS. MARCH. It hasn't helped your daughter.

BLY. I was speakin' philosophic! Well, I'll go 'ome now, and prepare meself for the worst.

MRS. MARCH. Has Cook given you your money?

BLY. She 'as. [*He goes out gloomily and is nearly overthrown in the doorway by the violent entry of JOHNNY.*]

JOHNNY. What's this, Mother? I won't have it—it's pre-war.

MRS. MARCH. [*Indicating MR. BLY*] Johnny!

[*JOHNNY waves BLY out of the room and closes the door.*]

JOHNNY. I won't have her go. She's a pathetic little creature.

MRS. MARCH. [*Unruffled*] She's a minx.

JOHNNY. Mother!

MRS. MARCH. Now, Johnny, be sensible. She's a very pretty girl, and this is my house.

JOHNNY. Of course you think the worst. Trust anyone who wasn't in the war for that!

MRS. MARCH. I don't think either the better or the worse. Kisses are kisses!

JOHNNY. Mother, you're like the papers—you put in all the vice and leave out all the virtue, and call that human nature. The kiss was an accident that I bitterly regret.

MRS. MARCH. Johnny, how can you?

JOHNNY. Dash it! You know what I mean. I regret it with my—my conscience. It shan't occur again.

MRS. MARCH. Till next time.

JOHNNY. Mother, you make me despair. You're so matter-of-fact, you never give one credit for a pure ideal.

MRS. MARCH. I know where ideals lead.

JOHNNY. Where?

MRS. MARCH. Into the soup. And the purer they are, the hotter the soup.

JOHNNY. And you married father!

MRS. MARCH. I did.

JOHNNY. Well, that girl is not to be chucked out; I won't have her on my chest.

MRS. MARCH. That's why she's going, Johnny.

JOHNNY. She is not. Look at me!

[MRS. MARCH *looks at him from across the dining-table, for he has marched up to it, till they are staring at each other across the now cleared rosewood.*

MRS. MARCH. How are you going to stop her?

JOHNNY. Oh, I'll stop her right enough. If I stuck it out in Hell, I can stick it out in Highgate.

MRS. MARCH. Johnny, listen. I've watched this girl; and I don't watch what I want to see—like your father—I watch what *is*. She's not a hard case—yet; but she will be.

JOHNNY. And why? Because all you matter-of-fact people make up your minds to it. What earthly chance has she had?

MRS. MARCH. She's a baggage. There are such things, you know, Johnny.

JOHNNY. She's a little creature who went down in the scum and has been kicked about ever since.

MRS. MARCH. I'll give her money, if you'll keep her at arm's length.

JOHNNY. I call that revolting. What she wants is the human touch.

MRS. MARCH. I've not a doubt of it. [JOHNNY *risés in disgust.*] Johnny, what is the use of wrapping the thing up in catchwords? Human touch! A young man like you never saved a girl like her. It's as fantastic as—as Tolstoi's "Resurrection."

JOHNNY. Tolstoi was the most truthful writer that ever lived.

MRS. MARCH. Tolstoi was a Russian—always proving that what isn't, is.

JOHNNY. Russians are charitable, anyway, and see into other people's souls.

MRS. MARCH. That's why they're hopeless.

JOHNNY. Well—for cynicism——

MRS. MARCH. It's at least as important, Johnny, to see into ourselves as into other people. I've been trying to make your father understand that ever since we married. He'd be such a good writer if he did—he wouldn't write at all.

JOHNNY. Father has imagination.

MRS. MARCH. And no business to meddle with practical affairs. You and he always ride in front of the hounds. Do you remember when the war broke out, how angry you were with me because I said we were fighting from a sense of self-preservation? Well, weren't we?

JOHNNY. That's what I'm doing now, anyway.

MRS. MARCH. Saving this girl, to save yourself?

JOHNNY. I must have something decent to do sometimes. There isn't an ideal left.

MRS. MARCH. If you knew how tired I am of the word, Johnny!

JOHNNY. There are thousands who feel like me—that the bottom's out of everything. It sickens me that anything in the least generous should get sat on by all you people who haven't risked your lives.

MRS. MARCH. [*With a smile*] I risked mine when you were born, Johnny. You were always very difficult.

JOHNNY. That girl's been telling me—I can see the whole thing.

MRS. MARCH. The fact that she suffered doesn't alter her nature; or the danger to you and us.

JOHNNY. There *is* no danger—I told her I didn't mean it

MRS. MARCH. And she smiled? Didn't she?

JOHNNY. I—I don't know.

MRS. MARCH. If you were ordinary, Johnny, it would be the girl's look-out. But you're not, and I'm not going to have you in the trap she'll set for you.

JOHNNY. You think she's a designing minx. I tell you she's got no more design in her than a rabbit. She's just at the mercy of anything.

MRS. MARCH. That's the trap. She'll play on your feelings, and you'll be caught.

JOHNNY. I'm not a baby.

MRS. MARCH. You are—and she'll smother *you*.

JOHNNY. How beastly women are to each other!

MRS. MARCH. We know ourselves, you see. The girl's father realizes perfectly what she is.

JOHNNY. Mr. Bly is a dodderer. And she's got no mother. I'll bet you've never realized the life girls who get outed lead. I've seen them—I saw them in France. It gives one the horrors.

MRS. MARCH. I can imagine it. But no girl gets "outed," as you call it, unless she's predisposed that way.

JOHNNY. That's all you know of the pressure of life.

MRS. MARCH. Excuse me, Johnny. I worked three years among factory girls, and I know how they manage to resist things when they've got stuff in them.

JOHNNY. Yes, I know what you mean by stuff—good hard self-preservative instinct. Why should the wretched girl who hasn't got that be turned down? She wants protection all the more.

MRS. MARCH. I've offered to help with money till she gets a place.

JOHNNY. And you know she won't take it. She's got that much stuff in her. This place is her only chance. I appeal to you, Mother—please tell her not to go.

MRS. MARCH. I shall not, Johnny.

JOHNNY. [*Turning abruptly*] Then we know where we are.

MRS. MARCH. I know where you'll be before a week's over.

JOHNNY. Where?

MRS. MARCH. In her arms.

JOHNNY. [*From the door, grimly*] If I am, I'll have the right to be!

MRS. MARCH. Johnny! [*But he is gone.*]

[*MRS. MARCH follows to call him back, but is met by MARY.*]

MARY. So you've tumbled, Mother?

MRS. MARCH. I should think I have! Johnny is making an idiot of himself about that girl.

MARY. He's got the best intentions.

MRS. MARCH. It's all your father. What can one expect when your father carries on like a lunatic over his paper every morning?

MARY. Father must have opinions of his own.

MRS. MARCH. He has only one: Whatever is, is wrong.

MARY. He can't help being intellectual, Mother.

MRS. MARCH. If he would only learn that the value of a sentiment is the amount of sacrifice you are prepared to make for it!

MARY. Yes: I read that in *The Times* yesterday. Father's much safer than Johnny. Johnny isn't safe at all; he might make a sacrifice any day. What were they doing?

MRS. MARCH. Cook caught them kissing.

MARY. How truly horrible!

[*As she speaks* MR. MARCH *comes in.*

MR. MARCH. I met Johnny using the most poetic language. What's happened?

MRS. MARCH. He and that girl. Johnny's talking nonsense about wanting to save her. I've told her to pack up.

MR. MARCH. Isn't that rather coercive, Joan?

MRS. MARCH. Do you approve of Johnny getting entangled with this girl?

MR. MARCH. No. I was only saying to Mary——

MRS. MARCH. Oh! You were!

MR. MARCH. But I can quite see why Johnny——

MRS. MARCH. The Government, I suppose!

MR. MARCH. Certainly.

MRS. MARCH. Well, perhaps you'll get us out of the mess you've got us into.

MR. MARCH. Where's the girl?

MRS. MARCH. In her room—packing.

MR. MARCH. We must devise means—— [MRS. MARCH *smiles.*] The first thing is to see into them—and find out exactly——

MRS. MARCH. Heavens! Are you going to have them X-rayed? They haven't got chest trouble, Geof.

MR. MARCH. They may have heart trouble. It's no good being hasty, Joan.

MRS. MARCH. Oh! For a man that can't see an inch into human nature, give me a—psychological novelist!

MR. MARCH. [*With dignity*] Mary, go and see where Johnny is.

MARY. Do you want him here!

MR. MARCH. Yes.

MARY. [*Dubiously*] Well—if I can. [*She goes out.*

[*A silence, during which the MARCHES look at each other by those turns which characterize exasperated domesticity.*

MRS. MARCH. If she doesn't go, Johnny must. Are you going to turn him out?

MR. MARCH. Of course not. We must reason with him.

MRS. MARCH. Reason with young people whose lips were glued together half an hour ago! Why ever did you force me to take this girl?

MR. MARCH. [*Ruefully*] One can't *always* resist a kindly impulse, Joan. What does Mr. Bly say to it?

MRS. MARCH. Mr. Bly? "Follow your instincts"—and then complains of his daughter for following them.

MR. MARCH. The man's a philosopher.

MRS. MARCH. Before we know where we are, we shall be having Johnny married to that girl.

MR. MARCH. Nonsense!

MRS. MARCH. Oh, Geof! Whenever you're faced with reality, you say "Nonsense!" You know Johnny's got chivalry on the brain. [*MARY comes in.*

MARY. He's at the top of the servants' staircase, outside her room. He's sitting in an armchair, with its back to her door.

MR. MARCH. Good Lord! Direct action!

MARY. He's got his pipe, a pound of chocolate, three volumes of *Monte Cristo*, and his old concertina. He says it's better than the trenches.

MR. MARCH. My hat! Johnny's made a joke. This is serious.

MARY. Nobody can get up, and she can't get down. He

says he'll stay there till all's blue, and it's no use either of you coming unless mother caves in.

MR. MARCH. I wonder if Cook could do anything with him?

MARY. She's tried. He told her to go to hell.

MR. MARCH. I say! And what did Cook——?

MARY. She's gone.

MR. MARCH. Tt! tt! This is very awkward.

[COOK enters through the door which MARY has left open.

MR. MARCH. Ah, Cook! You're back, then? What's to be done?

MRS. MARCH. [With a laugh] We must devise means!

COOK. Oh, ma'am, it does remind me so of the tantrums he used to get into, dear little feller! [Smiles with recollection.

MRS. MARCH. [Sharply] You're not to take him up anything to eat, Cook!

COOK. Oh! But Master Johnny does get so hungry. It'll drive him wild, ma'am. Just a snack now and then!

MRS. MARCH. No, Cook. Mind—that's flat!

COOK. Aren't I to feed Faith, ma'am?

MR. MARCH. Gad! It wants it!

MRS. MARCH. Johnny must come down to earth.

COOK. Ah! I remember how he used to fall down when he was little—he *would* go about with his head in the air. But he always picked himself up like a little man.

MARY. Listen!

[They all listen. The distant sounds of a concertina being played with fury drift in through the open door.

COOK. Don't it sound 'eavenly!

[The concertina utters a long wail.

The curtain falls.

ACT III

The MARCH's dining-room on the same evening at the end of a perfunctory dinner. MRS. MARCH sits at the dining-table with her back to the windows, MARY opposite the hearth, and MR. MARCH with his back to it. JOHNNY is not present. Silence and gloom.

MR. MARCH. We always seem to be eating.

MRS. MARCH. *You've eaten nothing.*

MR. MARCH. [*Pouring himself out a liqueur glass of brandy but not drinking it*] It's humiliating to think we can't exist without. [*Relapses into gloom.*]

MRS. MARCH. Mary, pass him the walnuts.

MARY. I was thinking of taking them up to Johnny.

MR. MARCH. [*Looking at his watch*] He's been there six hours; even he can't live on faith.

MRS. MARCH. If Johnny wants to make a martyr of himself, I can't help it.

MARY. How many days are you going to let him sit up there, Mother?

MR. MARCH. [*Glancing at MRS. MARCH*] I never in my life knew anything so ridiculous.

MRS. MARCH. Give me a little glass of brandy, Geof.

MR. MARCH. Good! That's the first step towards seeing reason.

[*He pours brandy into a liqueur glass from the decanter which stands between them. MRS. MARCH puts the brandy to her lips and makes a little face, then swallows it down manfully. MARY gets up with the walnuts and goes. Silence. Gloom.*]

MRS. MARCH. Horrid stuff!

MR. MARCH. Haven't you begun to see that your policy's hopeless, Joan? Come! Tell the girl she can stay. If we make

Johnny *feel* victorious—we can deal with him. It's just personal pride—the curse of this world. Both you and Johnny are as stubborn as mules.

MRS. MARCH. Human nature *is* stubborn, Geof. That's what you easy-going people never see.

[MR. MARCH *gets up, vexed, and goes to the fireplace.*

MR. MARCH. [Turning] Well! This goes further than you think. It involves Johnny's affection and respect for you.

[MRS. MARCH *nervously refills the little brandy glass, and again empties it, with a grimacing shudder.*

MR. MARCH. [Noticing] That's better! You'll begin to see things presently.

[MARY *re-enters.*

MARY. He's been digging himself in. He's put a screen across the head of the stairs, and got Cook's blankets. He's going to sleep there.

MRS. MARCH. Did he take the walnuts?

MARY. No; he passed them in to *her*. He says he's on hunger strike. But he's eaten all the chocolate and smoked himself sick. He's having the time of his life, Mother.

MR. MARCH. There you are!

MRS. MARCH. Wait till this time to-morrow.

MARY. Cook's been up again. He wouldn't let her pass. She'll have to sleep in the spare room.

MR. MARCH. I say!

MARY. And he's got the books out of her room.

MRS. MARCH. D'you know what they are? *The Scarlet Pimpernel, The Wide Wide World, and the Bible.*

MARY. Johnny likes romance. [She crosses to the fire.

MR. MARCH. [In a low voice] Are you going to leave him up there with the girl and that inflammatory literature all night? Where's your common sense, Joan?

[MRS. MARCH *starts up, presses her hand over her brow, and sits down again. She is stumped.*]

[With consideration for her defeat.] Have another tot! [He pours it out.] Let Mary go up with a flag of truce, and ask them both to come down for a thorough discussion of the whole

thing, on condition that they can go up again if we don't come to terms.

MRS. MARCH. Very well! I'm quite willing to meet him. I hate quarrelling with Johnny.

MR. MARCH. Good! I'll go myself. [He goes out.]

MARY. Mother, this isn't a coal strike; *don't* discuss it for three hours and then at the end ask Johnny and the girl to do precisely what you're asking them to do now!

MRS. MARCH. Why should I?

MARY. Because it's so usual. Do fix on half-way at once.

MRS. MARCH. There is no half-way.

MARY. Well, for goodness sake think of a plan which will make you both *look* victorious. That's always done in the end. Why not let her stay, and make Johnny promise only to see her in the presence of a third party?

MRS. MARCH. Because she'd see him every day while he was looking for the third party. She'd help him look for it.

MARY. [*With a gurgle*] Mother, I'd no idea you were so—French.

MRS. MARCH. It seems to me you none of you have any idea what I am.

MARY. Well, do remember that there'll be no publicity to make either of you look small. You can have Peace with Honour, whatever you decide. [*Listening.*] There they are! Now, Mother, don't be logical! It's so *feminine*.

[*As the door opens, MRS. MARCH nervously fortifies herself with the third little glass of brandy. She remains seated. MARY is on her right.*

[MR. MARCH leads into the room and stands next his daughter, then FAITH in hat and coat to the left of the table, and JOHNNY, pale but determined, last. Assembled thus, in a half fan, of which MRS. MARCH is the apex, so to speak, they are all extremely embarrassed, and no wonder.

[Suddenly MARY gives a little gurgle.]

JOHNNY. You'd think it funnier if you'd just come out of

prison and were going to be chucked out of your job, on to the world again.

FAITH. I didn't want to come down here. If I'm to go I want to go at once. And if I'm not, it's my evening out, please.

[*She moves towards the door. JOHNNY takes her by the shoulders.*

JOHNNY. Stand still, and leave it to me. [FAITH *looks up at him, hypnotized by his determination.*] Now, Mother, I've come down at your request to discuss this; are you ready to keep her? Otherwise up we go again.

MR. MARCH. That's not the way to go to work, Johnny. You mustn't ask people to eat their words raw—like that.

JOHNNY. Well, I've had no dinner, but I'm not going to eat my words, I tell you plainly.

MRS. MARCH. Very well then; go up again.

MARY. [*Muttering*] Mother—logic.

MR. MARCH. Great Scott! You two haven't the faintest idea of how to conduct a parley. We have—to—er—explore every path to find a way to peace.

MRS. MARCH. [*To FAITH*] Have you thought of anything to do, if you leave here?

FAITH. Yes.

JOHNNY. What!

FAITH. I shan't say.

JOHNNY. Of course, she'll just chuck herself away.

FAITH. No, I won't. I'll go to a place I know of, where they don't want references.

JOHNNY. Exactly!

MRS. MARCH. [*To FAITH*] I want to ask you a question. Since you came out, is this the first young man who's kissed you?

[FAITH *has hardly had time to start and manifest what may or may not be indignation when MR. MARCH dashes his hands through his hair.*

MR. MARCH. Joan, really!

JOHNNY. [*Grimly*] Don't condescend to answer!

MRS. MARCH. I thought we'd met to get at the truth.

MARY. But do they ever?

FAITH. I *will* go out!

JOHNNY. No! [*And, as his back is against the door, she can't.*] I'll see that you're not insulted any more.

MR. MARCH. Johnny, I know you have the best intentions, but really the proper people to help the young are the old—like—— [*FAITH suddenly turns her eyes on him, and he goes on rather hurriedly*—your mother. I'm sure that she and I will be ready to stand by Faith.

FAITH. I don't want charity.

MR. MARCH. No, no! But I hope——

MRS. MARCH. To devise means.

MR. MARCH. [*Roused*] Of course, if nobody will modify their attitude—Johnny, you ought to be ashamed of yourself, and [*To MRS. MARCH*] so ought you, Joan.

JOHNNY. [*Suddenly*] I'll modify mine. [*To FAITH*] Come here—close! [*In a low voice to FAITH*] Will you give me your word to stay here, if I make them keep you?

FAITH. Why?

JOHNNY. To stay here quietly for the next two years?

FAITH. I don't know.

JOHNNY. I can make them, if you'll promise.

FAITH. You're just in a temper.

JOHNNY. Promise!

[*During this colloquy the MARCHES have been so profoundly uneasy that MRS. MARCH has poured out another glass of brandy.*]

MR. MARCH. Johnny, the terms of the Armistice didn't include this sort of thing. It was to be all open and above-board.

JOHNNY. Well, if you don't keep her, I shall clear out.

[*At this bombshell MRS. MARCH rises.*]

MARY. Don't joke, Johnny! You'll do yourself an injury.

JOHNNY. And if I go, I go for good.

MR. MARCH. Nonsense, Johnny! Don't carry a good thing too far!

JOHNNY. I mean it.

MRS. MARCH. What will you live on?

JOHNNY. Not poetry.

MRS. MARCH. What, then?

JOHNNY. Emigrate or go into the Police.

MR. MARCH. Good Lord! [*Going up to his wife—in a low voice*] Let her stay till Johnny's in his right mind.

FAITH. I don't want to stay.

JOHNNY. You shall!

MARY. Johnny, don't be a lunatic! [*Cook enters, flustered.*]

COOK. Mr. Bly, ma'am, come after his daughter.

MR. MARCH. He can have her—he can have her!

COOK. Yes, sir. But, you see, he's—— Well, there! He's cheerful.

MR. MARCH. Let him come and take his daughter away.

[*But MR. BLY has entered behind him. He has a fixed expression, and speaks with a too perfect accuracy.*]

BLY. Did your two Cooks tell you I'm here?

MR. MARCH. If you want your daughter, you can take her.

JOHNNY. Mr. Bly, get out!

BLY. [*Ignoring him*] I don't want any fuss with your two Cooks. [*Catching sight of MRS. MARCH*] I've prepared myself for this.

MRS. MARCH. So we see.

BLY. I 'ad a bit 'o trouble, but I kep' on till I see 'Aigel walkin' at me in the loo-lookin' glass. Then I knew I'd got me balance. [*They all regard MR. BLY in a fascinated manner.*]

FAITH. Father! You've been drinking.

BLY. [*Smiling*] What do you think?

MR. MARCH. We have a certain sympathy with you, Mr. Bly.

BLY. [*Gazing at his daughter*] I don't want that one. I'll take the other.

MARY. Don't repeat yourself, Mr. Bly.

BLY. [*With a flash of muddled insight*] Well! There's two of everybody; two of my daughter; an' two of the 'Ome Secretary; and two—two of Cook—an' I don't want either. [*He waves COOK aside, and grasps at a void alongside FAITH.*] Come along!

MR. MARCH. [*Going up to him*] Very well, Mr. Bly! See her home, carefully. Good-night!

BLY. Shake hands!

[*He extends his other hand; MR. MARCH grasps it and turns him round towards the door.*]

MR. MARCH. Now, take her away! Cook, go and open the front door for Mr. Bly and his daughter.

BLY. Too many Cooks!

MR. MARCH. Now then, Mr. Bly, take her along!

BLY. [*Making no attempt to acquire the real FAITH—to an apparition which he leads with his right hand*] You're the one that died when my girl was 'ung. Will you go first or shall—I?
[*The apparition does not answer.*]

MARY. Don't! It's horrible!

FAITH. I *did* die.

BLY. Prepare yourself. Then you'll see what you never saw before.

[*He goes out with his apparition, shepherded by MR. MARCH.*]

[*MRS. MARCH drinks off her fourth glass of brandy. A peculiar whistle is heard through the open door, and FAITH starts forward.*]

JOHNNY. Stand still!

FAITH. I—I must go.

MARY. Johnny—let her!

FAITH. There's a friend waiting for me.

JOHNNY. Let her wait! You're not fit to go out to-night.

MARY. Johnny! Really! You're not the girl's Friendly Society!

JOHNNY. You none of you care a pin's head what becomes of her. Can't you see she's on the edge?

[*The whistle is heard again, but fainter.*]

FAITH. I'm not in prison now.

JOHNNY. [*Taking her by the arm*] All right! I'll come with you.

FAITH. [*Recoiling*] No. [*Voices are heard in the hall.*]

MARY. Who's that with father? Johnny, for goodness' sake don't make us all ridiculous.

[MR. MARCH's voice is heard saying: "Your friend is in here." He enters, followed by a reluctant young man in a dark suit, with dark hair and a pale square face, enlivened by strange, very living, dark, bull's eyes.

MR. MARCH. [To FAITH, who stands shrinking a little] I came on this—er—friend of yours outside; he's been waiting for you some time, he says.

MRS. MARCH. [To FAITH] You can go now.

JOHNNY. [Suddenly, to the YOUNG MAN] Who are you?

YOUNG M. Ask another! [To FAITH] Are you ready?

JOHNNY. [Seeing red] No, she's not; and you'll just clear out.

MR. MARCH. Johnny!

YOUNG M. What have you got to do with her?

JOHNNY. Quit.

YOUNG M. I'll quit with her, and not before. She's my girl.

JOHNNY. Are you his girl?

FAITH. Yes.

[MRS. MARCH sits down again, and reaching out her left hand, mechanically draws to her the glass of brandy which her husband had poured out for himself and left undrunk.

JOHNNY. Then why did you—[He is going to say: "Kiss me," but checks himself]—let me think you hadn't any friends? Who is this fellow?

YOUNG M. A little more civility, please.

JOHNNY. You look a blackguard, and I believe you are.

MR. MARCH. [With perfunctory authority] I really can't have this sort of thing in my house. Johnny, go upstairs; and you two, please go away.

YOUNG M. [To JOHNNY] We know the sort of chap you are—takin' advantage of workin' girls.

JOHNNY. That's a foul lie. Come into the garden and I'll prove it on your carcase.

YOUNG M. All right!

FAITH. No; he'll hurt you. He's been in the war.

JOHNNY. [To the YOUNG MAN] You haven't, I'll bet.

YOUNG M. I didn't come here to be slanged.

JOHNNY. This poor girl is going to have a fair deal, and you're not going to give it her. I can see that with half an eye.

YOUNG M. You'll see it with no eyes when I've done with you.

JOHNNY. Come on, then. [*He goes up to the windows.*]

MR. MARCH. For God's sake, Johnny, stop this vulgar brawl!

FAITH. [*Suddenly*] I'm not a "poor girl" and I won't be called one. I don't want any soft words. Why can't you let me be? [*Pointing to JOHNNY*] He talks wild. [*JOHNNY clutches the edge of the writing-table.*] Thinks he can "rescue" me. I don't want to be rescued. I—— [*All the feeling of years rises to the surface now that the barrier has broken.*]—I want to be let alone. I've paid for everything I've done—a pound for every shilling's worth. And all because of one minute when I was half crazy. [*Flashing round at MARY*] Wait till you've had a baby you oughtn't to have had, and not a penny in your pocket! It's money—money—all money!

YOUNG M. Sst! 'That'll do!

FAITH. I'll have what I like now, not what you think's good for me.

MR. MARCH. God knows we don't want to——

FAITH. You mean very well, Mr. March, but you're no good.

MR. MARCH. I knew it.

FAITH. You were very kind to me. But you don't see; nobody sees.

YOUNG M. There! That's enough! You're gettin' excited. You come away with me.

[*FAITH's look at him is like the look of a dog at her master.*]

JOHNNY. [*From the background*] I know you're a blackguard—I've seen your sort.

FAITH. [*Firing up*] Don't call him names! I won't have it. I'll go with whom I choose! [*Her eyes suddenly fix themselves on the YOUNG MAN's face.*] And I'm going with him!

[*Cook enters.*]

MR. MARCH. What now, Cook?

COOK. A Mr. Barnabas in the hall, sir. From the police.

[*Everybody starts. MRS. MARCH drinks off her fifth little glass of brandy, then sits again.*]

MR. MARCH. From the police?

[*He goes out, followed by COOK. A moment's suspense.*]

YOUNG M. Well, I can't wait any longer. I suppose we can go out the back way?

[*He draws FAITH towards the windows. But JOHNNY stands there, barring the way.*]

JOHNNY. No, you don't.

FAITH. [*Scared*] Oh! Let me go—let him go!

JOHNNY. You may go. [*He takes her arm to pull her to the window.*] He can't.

FAITH. [*Freeing herself*] No—no! Not if he doesn't.

[*JOHNNY has an evident moment of hesitation, and before it is over MR. MARCH comes in again, followed by a man in a neat suit of plain clothes.*]

MR. MARCH. I should like you to say that in front of her.

P. C. MAN. Your service, ma'am. Afraid I'm intruding here. Fact is, I've been waiting for a chance to speak to this young woman quietly. It's rather public here, sir; but if you wish, of course, I'll mention it. [*He waits for some word from someone; no one speaks, so he goes on almost apologetically.*] Well, now, you're in a good place here, and you ought to keep it. You don't want fresh trouble, I'm sure.

FAITH. [*Scared*] What do you want with me?

P. C. MAN. I don't want to frighten you; but we've had word passed that you're associating with the young man there. I observed him to-night again, waiting outside here and whistling.

YOUNG M. What's the matter with whistling?

P. C. MAN. [*Eyeing him*] I should keep quiet if I was you. As *you* know, sir [*To MR. MARCH*] there's a law nowadays against sootenoors.

MR. MARCH. Soo——?

JOHNNY. I knew it.

P. C. MAN. [*Deprecating*] I don't want to use any plain English—with ladies present——

YOUNG M. I don't know you. What are you after? Do you dare——?

P. C. MAN. We cut the darin', 't isn't necessary. We know all about you.

FAITH. It's a lie!

P. C. MAN. There, miss, don't let your feelings——

FAITH. [*To the YOUNG MAN*] It's a lie, isn't it?

YOUNG M. A blankety lie.

MR. MARCH. [*To BARNABAS*] Have you actual proof?

YOUNG M. Proof? It's his job to get chaps into a mess.

P. C. MAN. [*Sharply*] None of your lip, now!

[*At the new tone in his voice FAITH turns and visibly quails, like a dog that has been shown a whip.*]

MR. MARCH. Inexpressibly painful!

YOUNG M. Ah! How would you like to be insulted in front of your girl? If you're a gentleman you'll tell him to leave the house. If he's got a warrant, let him produce it; if he hasn't, let him get out.

P. C. MAN. [*To MR. MARCH*] You'll understand, sir, that my object in speakin' to you to-night was for the good of the girl. Strictly, I've gone a bit out of my way. If my job was to get men into trouble, as he says, I'd only to wait till he's got hold of her. These fellows, you know, are as cunning as lynxes and as impudent as the devil.

YOUNG M. Now, look here, if I get any more of this from you—I—I'll consult a lawyer.

JOHNNY. Fellows like you——

MR. MARCH. Johnny!

P. C. MAN. Your son, sir?

YOUNG M. Yes; and wants to be where I am. But my girl knows better; don't you? [*He gives FAITH a look which has a certain magnetism.*]

P. C. MAN. If we could have the Court cleared of ladies, sir, we might speak a little plainer.

MR. MARCH. Joan!

[*But MRS. MARCH does not vary her smiling immobility; FAITH draws a little nearer to the YOUNG MAN. MARY turns to the fire.*]

P. C. MAN. [*With half a smile*] I keep on forgettin' that women are men nowadays. Well!

YOUNG M. When you've quite done joking, we'll go for our walk.

MR. MARCH. [*To BARNABAS*] I think you'd better tell her anything you know.

P. C. MAN. [*Eyeing FAITH and the YOUNG MAN*] I'd rather not be more precise, sir, at this stage.

YOUNG M. I should think not! Police spite! [*To FAITH*] You know what the Law is, once they get a down on you.

P. C. MAN. [*To MR. MARCH*] It's our business to keep an eye on all this sort of thing, sir, with girls who've just come out.

JOHNNY. [*Deeply*] You've only to look at his face!

YOUNG M. My face is as good as yours.

[*FAITH lifts her face to his.*]

P. C. MAN. [*Taking in that look*] Well, there it is! Sorry I wasted my time and yours, sir!

MR. MARCH. [*Distracted*] My goodness! Now, Faith, consider! This is the turning-point. I've told you we'll stand by you.

FAITH. [*Flashing round*] Leave me alone! I stick to my friends. Leave me alone, and leave him alone! What is it to you?

P. C. MAN. [*With sudden resolution*] Now, look here! This man George Blunter was had up three years ago for livin' on the earnings of a woman called Johnson. He was dismissed with a caution. We got him again last year over a woman called Lee—that time he did——

YOUNG M. Stop it! That's enough of your lip. I won't put up with this—not for any woman in the world. Not I!

FAITH. [*With a sway towards him*] It's not——!

YOUNG M. I'm off! Bong Swore la Companee!

[*He turns on his heel and walks out unhindered.*]

P. C. MAN. [*Deeply*] A bad hat, that; if ever there was one. We'll be having him again before long.

[*He looks at FAITH. They all look at FAITH. But her face is so strange, so tremulous, that they all turn their eyes away.*]

FAITH. He—he said—he——!

[*On the verge of an emotional outbreak, she saves herself by an effort. A painful silence.*]

P. C. MAN. Well, sir—that's all. Good-evening!

[*He turns to the door, touching his forehead to MR. MARCH, and goes.*]

[*As the door closes, FAITH sinks into a chair, and burying her face in her hands, sobs silently. MRS. MARCH sits motionless with a faint smile. JOHNNY stands at the window biting his nails. MARY crosses to FAITH.*]

MARY. [*Softly*] Don't. You weren't really fond of him?

[*FAITH bends her head.*]

MARY. But how could you? He——!

FAITH. I—I couldn't see inside him.

MARY. Yes; but he looked—couldn't you see he looked——?

FAITH. [*Suddenly flinging up her head*] If you'd been two years without a word, you'd believe anyone that said he liked you.

MARY. Perhaps I should.

FAITH. But I don't want him—he's a liar. I don't like liars.

MARY. I'm awfully sorry.

FAITH. [*Looking at her*] Yes—you keep off feeling—then you'll be happy! [*Rising.*] Good-bye!

MARY. Where are you going?

FAITH. To my father.

MARY. With him in that state?

FAITH. He won't hurt me.

MARY. You'd better stay. Mother, she *can* stay, can't she?

[*MRS. MARCH nods.*]

FAITH. No!

MARY. Why not? We're all sorry. Do! You'd better.

FAITH. Father'll come over for my things to-morrow.

MARY. What are you going to do?

FAITH. [*Proudly*] I'll get on.

JOHNNY. [*From the window*] Stop! [*All turn and look at him. He comes down.*] Will you come to me?

[*FAITH stares at him. MRS. MARCH continues to smile faintly.*]

MARY. [*With a horrified gesture*] Johnny!

JOHNNY. Will you? I'll play cricket if you do.

MR. MARCH. [*Under his breath*] Good God!

[*He stares in suspense at FAITH, whose face is a curious blend of fascinating and live feeling.*]

JOHNNY. Well?

FAITH. [*Softly*] Don't be silly! I've got no call on you. You don't care for me, and I don't for you. No! You go and put your head in ice. [*She turns to the door.*] Good-bye, Mr. March! I'm sorry I've been so much trouble.

MR. MARCH. Not at all, not at all!

FAITH. Oh! Yes, I have. There's nothing to be done with a girl like me. [*She goes out.*]

JOHNNY. [*Taking up the decanter to pour himself out a glass of brandy*] Empty!

COOK. [*Who has entered with a tray*] Yes, my dearie, I'm sure you are.

JOHNNY. [*Staring at his father*] A vision, Dad! Windows of Clubs—men sitting there; and that girl going by with rouge on her cheeks——

COOK. Oh! Master Johnny!

JOHNNY. A blue night—the moon over the Park. And she stops and looks at it.—What has she wanted—the beautiful—something better than she's got—something that she'll never get!

COOK. Oh! Master Johnny!

[*She goes up to JOHNNY and touches his forehead. He comes to himself and hurries to the door, but suddenly MRS. MARCH utters a little feathery laugh. She stands up, swaying slightly. There is*]

something unusual and charming in her appearance, as if formality had dropped from her.

MRS. MARCH. [*With a sort of delicate slow lack of perfect sobriety*] I see—it—all. You—can't—help—unless—you—love!

[JOHNNY stops and looks round at her.]

MR. MARCH. [*Moving a little towards her*] Joan!

MRS. MARCH. She—wants—to—be—loved. It's the way of the world.

MARY. [*Turning*] Mother!

MRS. MARCH. You thought she wanted—to be saved. Silly! She—just—wants—to—be—loved. Quite natural!

MR. MARCH. Joan, what's happened to you?

MRS. MARCH. [*Smiling and nodding*] See—people—as—they—are! Then you won't be—disappointed. Don't—have—ideals! Have—vision—just simple—vision!

MR. MARCH. Your mother's not well.

MRS. MARCH. [*Passing her hand over her forehead*] It's hot in here!

MR. MARCH. Mary!

[MARY throws open the French windows.]

MRS. MARCH. [*Delightfully*] The room's full of—GAS. Open the windows! Open! And let's—walk—out—into the air! [*She turns and walks delicately out through the opened windows; JOHNNY and MARY follow her. The moonlight and the air flood in.*]

COOK. [*Coming to the table and taking up the empty decanter*] My Holy Ma!

MR. MARCH. Is this the Millennium, Cook?

COOK. Oh! Master Geoffrey—there isn't a millehennium. There's too much human nature. We must look things in the face.

MR. MARCH. Ah! Neither up—nor down—but straight in the face! Quite a thought, Cook! Quite a thought!

The curtain falls.

OLD ENGLISH

CAST OF THE ORIGINAL PRODUCTION AT
THE HAYMARKET THEATRE, LONDON,
OCTOBER 21, 1924

PRODUCED BY E. LYALL SWETE

SYLVANUS HEYTHORP . . .	<i>Norman McKinnel</i>
GILBERT FARNEY . . .	<i>Austin Trevor</i>
BOB PILLIN . . .	<i>Reginald Bach</i>
CHARLES VENTNOR . . .	<i>Lawrence Hanray</i>
MR. BROWNLEE . . .	<i>Charles Garry</i>
ROSAMUND LARNE . . .	<i>Irene Rooke</i>
PHYLLIS . . .	<i>Joan Maude</i>
JOCK . . .	<i>Lewis Shaw</i>
JOSEPH PILLIN . . .	<i>H. R. Hignett</i>
ADELA HEYTHORP . . .	<i>Louise Hampton</i>
TWO CLERKS . . .	{ <i>Cecil Trouncer</i>
	{ <i>Godfrey Winn</i>
A DIRECTOR . . .	<i>Carteret Maule</i>
MR. WESTGATE . . .	<i>A. Blundell Murray</i>
MR. WINKLEY . . .	<i>W. Walton Palmer</i>
MR. BUDGEN . . .	<i>Gerald Ferome</i>
MR. APPLEBY . . .	<i>A. Harding Steerman</i>
A REPORTER . . .	<i>Charles Maunsel</i>
LETTY . . .	<i>Kitty Gordon-Lee</i>
MELLER . . .	<i>Cecil Brooking</i>
MOLLY . . .	<i>Ethne Honan</i>

ACT I

SCENE I

The Board Room of "The Island Navigation Company, Ltd." in Liverpool, about five in the afternoon. There are doors, Right, to the inner office, and Back, to the outer office. On the walls are photographs, and one or two models of ships. The Board is over, only the Chairman, OLD HEYTHORP, remains, presiding over the deserted battlefield of the brain—a long table still littered with the ink, pens, blotting-paper, and abandoned documents of five persons. He is sitting at the head of the table, with closed eyes, still and heavy as an image. One puffy, feeble hand rests on the arm of his chair. The thick white hair on his massive head, his red folded cheeks, white moustache, and little tuft of white on his chin, glisten in the light from green-shaded lamps. He seems asleep.

[GILBERT FARNEY, the Company's Secretary, enters from the outer office, Back, and steps briskly to the table. About thirty-five, he has the bright hues of the optimist in his eyes, cheeks, and lips. He begins silently to gather papers, but stops and looks at his Chairman. "Wonderful old boy!" he seems saying. Suddenly he sees the Chairman looking at him, and cuts off his regard. OLD HEYTHORP heaves a rumbling sigh.

HEYTHORP. Have they come, Mr. Farney?

FARNEY. Yes, sir; but I wasn't going to wake you.

HEYTHORP. Haven't been asleep. Let 'em wait. Suppose you know what they've come for?

FARNEY. Did I understand, sir, it was a meeting of your—er—creditors?

HEYTHORP. You did. Gold mine, Mr. Farney.

FARNEY. Yes, sir. I've heard—in Ecuador, wasn't it?

HEYTHORP. [*Nodding*] Thirteen years ago. Bought it lock, stock and barrel—half in cash, half in promises. These are the promises. Never been able to pay 'em off. The mine was as empty as their heads. [*Rumbling.*] Well, not bankrupt, yet.

FARNEY. No, indeed, sir. No one could get *you* down. Your speech for our General Meeting to-morrow? I suppose I'm to word it according to the decision of the Board this afternoon to buy the Pillin ships. That's a big thing, sir.

HEYTHORP. Never rest on your oars; go forward or you go back. *Toujours de l'audace!*

FARNEY. I should like to have that on our writing-paper, sir: "The Island Navigation Company—*Toujours de l'audace.*" But I must say I hope freights have touched bottom. Sixty thousand pounds is a lump for a small company like ours to lay out; there's bound to be some opposition from the shareholders.

HEYTHORP. They'll come to heel.

FARNEY. By the way, sir, young Mr. Pillin is here. He wants to see you for a minute.

HEYTHORP. Bring him in.

[*FARNEY goes to the door, Back, opens it and says "Mr. Pillin!"*]
BOB PILLIN *enters*; a tall young man with round, well-coloured cheeks, round eyes, little moustache, fur coat, spats, diamond pin, and silver-headed Malacca cane.

BOB. PILLIN. How de do, Mr. Heythorp?

HEYTHORP. How's your father?

BOB. PILLIN. Tha-anks, rather below par, worryin' about our ships. He sent me round to see if you've any news for him. He was comin' himself, only this weather——

HEYTHORP. Your father's got no chest—never had. Tell him from me to drink port—add five years to his life. [*BOB PILLIN chuckles.*] Beginning to look forward to his shoes, eh? Dibs and no responsibility. [*BOB PILLIN stops his own mouth with the head of his cane.*]

HEYTHORP. Scratch a poll, Poll! [*BOB PILLIN evacuates his mouth, startled.*] Give you a note for him presently. Help me up, Mr. Farney. [*FARNEY heaves and HEYTHORP pulls. The*

old man gets on his feet and passes, unimaginably slow, towards the inner office.] You can bring 'em in now. [*He goes.*]

BOB PILLIN. By Jove! the old boy is gettin' a back number. His nickname fits him down to the ground—"Old English"! He is.

FARNEY. [*Loyal to his Chairman*] He's a wonderful man. It's a treat to see him cross a road—everything has to wait for him.

BOB PILLIN. I say, those chaps in there—what have they come for?

FARNEY. I wonder, sir. [*Opening the door into the outer office.*] Come in, gentlemen. Will you wait in here, Mr. Pillin?

SIX GENTLEMEN *enter*—CHARLES VENTNOR, *first, encountering BOB PILLIN in the doorway.*

VENTNOR. Hallo, Pillin!

BOB PILLIN. Hallo, Ventnor! How are you?

VENTNOR. Thanks, bobbish!

BOB PILLIN. Mrs. Ventnor well?

VENTNOR. So-so. [*They cross each other and BOB PILLIN goes out.*]

[*CHARLES VENTNOR is short, squarely built, with a reddish-brown moustache; a certain fulvous-foxy look about him. He sits at the table. The second gentleman to come in, MR. BROWNBEE, is seventy years old, with a pink face and little thin grey whiskers. He sits next to VENTNOR. The other FOUR GENTLEMEN also take seats. FARNEY goes into the outer office.*]

VENTNOR. The old chap's got a nerve, keeping us hanging about like this.

BROWNBEE. I'm afraid he's very feeble, Mr. Ventnor—very feeble; only just gets about.

VENTNOR. He sticks to his Boards all right, Mr. Brownbee.

BROWNBEE. Can't retire, I fear—lives on his fees, they tell me.

VENTNOR. Old guinea-pig!

BROWNBEE. I think one must admire his resolution; quite a figure in Liverpool these twenty years—quite.

VENTNOR. [*Sinking his voice*] Awful old rip. Got at least one family he oughtn't to.

BROWNBEE. Tt, Tt! Is that so?

VENTNOR. [*Sinking his voice*] Fact! Rosamund Larne—the story-writer—client of mine—she's the widow of a son of his born long before his marriage. Fine-looking woman she is, too.

BROWNBEE. Ah! The early Victorians! Before the influence of the dear old Queen. Well, times change.

VENTNOR. Um! Don't know about that. But I do know he keeps me out of my money. [*Raising his voice.*] If you ask me, gentlemen, we'd better break the old ship up and salve what we can.

A CREDITOR. Pretty hard wood, Mr. Ventnor; real old man-o'-war teak.

VENTNOR. Well, his autocratic airs don't suit me. I'm for putting the screw on tight.

BROWNBEE. I think—I think, if you would leave it to me, Mr. Ventnor. The *suaviter in modo*——

VENTNOR. Will never get me my three hundred.

[*OLD HEYTHORP has entered. A silence falls. Five of the CREDITORS rise, but VENTNOR continues to sit. OLD HEYTHORP advances slowly, resumes his seat at the table, and looks round with a defiant twinkle. They all sit. FARNEY enters from the inner office, bringing a cup of tea which he places before OLD HEYTHORP.*

HEYTHORP. [*With a bow*] Excuse me, gentlemen; had a long Board. [*He conveys the cup to his mouth and drinks; his CREDITORS watch in suspense with which is blended a sort of admiration at his accomplishment of this difficult feat. OLD HEYTHORP puts the cup down, and feebly removes some drops from the little white tuft on his chin.*] Well! My bankers have given you every information, I hope.

A CREDITOR. [*A Clergyman*] Mr. Heythorp, we've appointed Mr. Brownbee to voice our views. Mr. Brownbee!

BROWNBEE. Mr. Heythorp, we are here to represent about £14,000. When we had the pleasure of meeting you last July, you held out a prospect of some more satisfactory arrangement

by Christmas. But we are now in February, and I am bound to say none of us get younger.

HEYTHORP. Don't you? H'm! *I feel like a boy.*

[The CREDITORS shuffle.]

VENTNOR. *[To BROWNBEE]* He's going to put us off again.

BROWNBEE. *[Suavely]* I'm sure we're very glad to hear it—very glad, indeed. U'm! To come to the point, however. We feel, Mr. Heythorp, not unreasonably, I think, that—well—bankruptcy would be the most satisfactory solution. We have waited a long time, and, to be quite frank, we don't see any prospect of improvement; indeed, we fear the opposite.

HEYTHORP. Think I'm going to join the majority, eh?

[A slight embarrassment among the CREDITORS.]

VENTNOR. Put it that way if you like.

HEYTHORP. My grandfather lived to be a hundred, gentlemen; my father ninety-six—three-bottle men, both of 'em. Only eighty odd myself; blameless life compared with theirs.

BROWNBEE. Indeed, we hope you have many years of this life before you—many.

HEYTHORP. You're getting a thousand a year out of my fees. I'll make it thirteen hundred. Bankrupt me, I shall lose my directorships, and you won't get a rap.

BROWNBEE. *[After a pause, clearing his throat]* We think you should make it at least fifteen hundred, Mr. Heythorp. We fancy you greatly underrate the possibilities of your bankruptcy.

HEYTHORP. I know 'em—you don't. My qualifying shares will fetch about a couple of thousand; my bank'll take most of that. House I live in, and everything in it, bar my togs, my wine, and my cigars, belong to my daughter under a settlement fifteen years ago. Got nothing else. Position in a nutshell, gentlemen.

BROWNBEE. We understand your income from your fees and dividends to be some two thousand pounds a year, sir.

HEYTHORP. *[Shaking his head]* Nineteen hundred in a good

year. Must eat and drink—must have a man to look after me, not as active as I was. Got people dependent on me. Can't do on less than six hundred. Thirteen hundred a year's all I can give you, gentlemen. No use beating about the bush; take it or leave it. [*The CREDITORS rise to consult.*]

VENTNOR. And if we leave it?

HEYTHORP. Kill the goose that lays the golden eggs—that's all.

BROWNBEE. Mr. Heythorp, in consideration of your—er— [*But he stops at the old man's fighting look*] we shall accept your offer of thirteen hundred a year.

HEYTHORP. Ah! Keep the bird alive—sound policy.

BROWNBEE. We certainly don't wish to press too hardly on one who for many years has been a man of mark in Liverpool. In fact, we—excuse me—admire your courage in keeping a stiff lip in spite of your—your—infirmities. [*OLD HEYTHORP bows to him, and he bows to OLD HEYTHORP.*] We feel you will do your best to give us all you can; and we—er—wish you many years of life.

CREDITOR. [*The Clergyman, rising*] I have long felt—not as a man of the world precisely—that Mr. Heythorp would feel his conscience lighter if we could relieve him of—

VENTNOR. Our money.

CREDITOR. [*Slightly disconcerted*] Well, that is perhaps in effect the position. We—er—are, in fact, a thorn in his side, and for his own good he feels no doubt that he would like to have us—er—removed. [*Laughs.*] If, however, the process must be—er—prolonged—

VENTNOR. Get on with it, sir.

CREDITOR. [*Disconcerted*] Exactly! With these few words, I am entirely at one with Mr. Brownbee.

VENTNOR. [*Sotto voce*] Amen!

HEYTHORP. Much obliged to you, gentlemen, very sporting of you. Shall act toward you in the same spirit.

BROWNBEE. Good-day, then, sir. Don't get up, I beg.

CREDITORS. Good-day, sir.

[OLD HEYTHORP *salutes them. They follow on the heels of MR. BROWNBEE. MR. VENTNOR has remained behind.*

VENTNOR. Sorry not to have been able to join the mutual admiration society, Mr. Heythorp. Your debt to me is £300. I think it might be worth your while to consider whether you can't settle that separately. I'm a lawyer, and neither very trustful nor very patient.

HEYTHORP. Go behind their backs, do you? Eh.

[VENTNOR, *very angry, is about to speak, when the door from the outer office is opened, and FARNEY enters.*

VENTNOR. You made a big mistake in saying that, Mr. Heythorp. Good-evening! [He goes out.

FARNEY. I beg your pardon, I thought you were alone, sir.

HEYTHORP. That's an ugly dog. What's his name?

FARNEY. Ventnor, sir; a solicitor. There are two ladies to see you, sir.

HEYTHORP. Ladies?

FARNEY. A Mrs. and Miss Larne; there's a boy with them.

HEYTHORP. M'yes! Well, show 'em in.

[FARNEY *opens the door into the outer office. ROSAMUND LARNE enters, preceded by her children, PHYLLIS and JOCK, who tweaks FARNEY's coat-tail as he passes, then stands seraphic, gazing at the ceiling, while FARNEY pursues his way out with dignity.*

PHYLLIS. Jock, you *are* an awful boy! Guardy, he really is too awful.

[PHYLLIS *is like a day in April, fair and fresh, and seventeen. The boy JOCK has a pink seraphic face, and the just breaking voice of fourteen; he wears Eton jacket and collar, and carries a school cap.*

PHYLLIS. He won't wear his overcoat, and he will wear that frightful cap with his Eton jacket. [JOCK *puts it on dreamily.*] Look! Isn't he a horror?

[MRS. LARNE *takes OLD HEYTHORP's puffy hand and presses it to her ample bosom. She is of a fine florid beauty and perhaps thirty-eight.*

MRS. LARNE. Dear old Guardy! Do forgive us for coming. I had to see you, and I couldn't leave these children outside, you never know what they'll do.

[While she speaks the boy JOCK has quietly pinned his mother's and sister's floating hat-scarves together, and, withdrawing, puts his fingers to his mouth and emits a piercing whistle. PHYLLIS rushing to thump him, the two hats fall off, and two hands fly to two heads.]

PHYLLIS. Isn't he a pig?

[Advancing on JOCK, she hustles him out into the outer office and stands with her back against the door.] MRS. LARNE adjusts her hat calmly, with her low, seductive laugh.

MRS. LARNE. I really had to come and see you, Guardy; we haven't had a sight of you for such an age. Phyllis, go and see after Jock, there's a darling. *[PHYLLIS tosses her head, wrenches open the door and slides out.]* How are you, dear old Guardy!

HEYTHORP. Never better. But I haven't a penny for you.

MRS. LARNE. *[With her laugh]* How naughty of you to think I came for that! But I am in a terrible fix, Guardy.

HEYTHORP. Never knew you not to be.

MRS. LARNE. Just let me tell you. It'll be some relief. I'm having the most dreadful time. *[She subsides into a chair beside him, with a luxurious sigh.]* Expect to be sold up any moment. We may be on the streets to-morrow. And I daren't tell the children; they're so happy, poor darlings. I've been obliged to take Jock away from school. And Phyllis has had to stop her piano and dancing; it's an absolute crisis. But for your three hundred, Guardy, you know I'm entirely dependent on my pen. And those Midland Syndicate people—I've been counting on at least two hundred from them for my new story, and the wretches have refused it. Such a delightful story! *[She prevents a tear from rolling on to her powdered cheek with a tiny handkerchief.]* It is hard, Guardy. I worked my brain silly over it.

HEYTHORP. Rats!

MRS. LARNE. Guardy, how can you? *[With a sigh that*

would rend no heart.] You couldn't, I suppose, let me have just one little hundred?

HEYTHORP. Not a bob.

[MRS. LARNE looks round the room, then leans towards him.

MRS. LARNE. Guardy, you *are* so like my dear Philip.

HEYTHORP. Your dear Philip! You led him a devil of a life, or I'm a Dutchman.

MRS. LARNE. Guardy! [*Her eyes wandering.*] This office looks so rich. I smelt money all the way upstairs. And your lovely house. We went there first, of course.

HEYTHORP. Not my house. My daughter's. She see you?

MRS. LARNE. We saw *someone* in the hall, when the butler was saying you were here at the office.

HEYTHORP. Deuce you did!

MRS. LARNE. *Such* a lovely house! Guardy, just imagine if your grandchildren were thrown out into the street. Even if they don't know it, still you *are* their grandfather. [OLD HEYTHORP *only grins.*] Do come to my rescue this once. You really might do something for them.

[OLD HEYTHORP's *defiant cynicism gives way to an idea which strikes him.*

HEYTHORP. H'm! Do something for them! Just got an idea. Yes.

MRS. LARNE. Oh! Guardy!

HEYTHORP. Wait a bit. I'll see. Yes! I'll see. Might be able.

MRS. LARNE. How lovely! But, Guardy, not *just* fifty now? [OLD HEYTHORP *shakes his head.*] Well, [*Getting up*] you'll be sorry when we come round one night and sing for pennies under your window. Isn't Phyllis growing a sweet gairl?

[*Throwing clouds of perfume, to judge by the expression of OLD HEYTHORP's nose, she goes out calling "Phyllis!"*

PHYLLIS. [*Entering*] There's *such* a young man in there. He can only just see over his collar. And the way he squints at me—Lawks!

HEYTHORP. Oh! that young pup—I'd clean forgot him.

Phyllis! Help me up. [PHYLLIS tries, and they succeed.] You a good girl?

PHYLLIS. No, Guardy. Can't be when Jock's at home.

HEYTHORP. [*He pats her cheek*] Mind! Chaps like that little-headed young pup in there—not for you. All the same mould, no drive, no vices—nothing. Thinks himself a spark. Why! at his age I'd broken my neck, winged a Yankee, been drowned for a bet, and lost my last bob on the Derby.

PHYLLIS. Had you, Guardy? How lovely!

HEYTHORP. H'm! Just keep him looking through his dog-collar, while I write a letter.

[*He again pats her cheek and goes out into the inner office. A piercing whistle is heard through the open door.*]

PHYLLIS. [*At the fire—to herself*] There goes Jock! He's bitten that young man, or something juicy.

[BOB PILLIN comes in.]

PHYLLIS. Oh! young man—so you've escaped! Isn't he a terror?

BOB PILLIN. [*Who is evidently much struck by her*] He is—er—rather. Er—cold, isn't it? [*Approaches fire.*]

PHYLLIS. Yes—jolly.

BOB PILLIN. [*Nervously*] I say, I've left my hat; do you think it's safe?

PHYLLIS. No, of course it isn't. I'll get it?

BOB PILLIN. [*More and more impressed*] No, no! Please don't go. It doesn't matter a bit. My name's Pillin—er—Bob. Are you a relation of "Old English"?

PHYLLIS. "Old English"!

BOB PILLIN. What! Don't you know his nick-name.

PHYLLIS. No; we call him Guardy. Isn't he a chook?

BOB PILLIN. Er—I don't know that I should have called him that—er—exactly. It's my Dad who's a friend of his, don't you know?

PHYLLIS. Is your Dad like him?

BOB PILLIN. *Not much!*

PHYLLIS. What a pity!

BOB PILLIN. Ha! D'you mind tellin' me your name?

PHYLLIS. Phyllis.

BOB PILLIN. Rippin'! We live at the last house in Sefton Park.

PHYLLIS. Oh! We live at Millicent Villas. It's a poky little house. We have awful larks though.

BOB PILLIN. Your brother keeps things lively, I expect.

PHYLLIS. Yes. He goes off all the time like a squib. [*Sounds are heard from the outer office.*] That's mother pinching him. We've never been here before. We call Guardy the last of the Stoic-uns.

BOB PILLIN. [*Still more struck*] I say—that's awfully good—that's—that's very funny.

[*The outer office door is opened and MRS. LARNE appears, holding JOCK by the ear, and in her other hand BOB PILLIN's flattened-out top hat.*]

MRS. LARNE. Is this your h-h-hat, Mr.—Mr.—?

[*Laughter overcomes her. PHYLLIS is in convulsions. JOCK seraphic.*]

BOB PILLIN. [*Taking it*] Er—it—it was.

PHYLLIS. I told you so.

MRS. LARNE. I'm so ashamed. I *thought* he was too quiet. And of course—he—he—was si-itting on it.

BOB. PILLIN. [*With a sort of gallantry*] Really! It's—it's—nothing. It doesn't matter a bit.

PHYLLIS. Oh! young man. What a fib! Such a lovely hat!

MRS. LARNE. What *can* we do? You must come and see us, Mr. Billing.

PHYLLIS. Pillin—Mother.

BOB PILLIN. Ah! er—yes.

MRS. LARNE. We shall be so pleased if you will.

BOB PILLIN. Thanks. [*Gazing at his hat.*] That'll be jolly!

PHYLLIS. We'll tie Jock up. [*JOCK rolls his eyes fearfully.*]

MRS. LARNE. Yes, you horrible boy! Ah! Here's dear Guardy. I shall tell him. [*JOCK simulates terror, as OLD HEYTHORP enters from the inner office.*] Guardy, we must go.

Good-bye! [*Lowering her voice.*] Then very soon you *will* do something, won't you? The children are *so* fond of you, Guardy! [*She presses his hand and swings to the door.*]

HEYTHORP. [*To BOB PILLIN*] Go round and tell your father I want to see him—now, at once.

BOB PILLIN. Oh! Thanks awf'ly, sir. I hope you'll cheer the old man up.

HEYTHORP. [*Pointing*] What's that thing?

BOB PILLIN. My—er—hat, sir.

[*PHYLLIS gives way, JOCK simulates terror.*]

MRS. LARNE. [*From the door*] Come along, you dreadful children. Mr. Pillin, will you see us to our train?

BOB PILLIN. Delighted! I—I'll just run up to our office—next door. Shan't be a shake.

PHYLLIS. [*To BOB, who is staring at his hat*] Oh! put it on. Do put it on.

[*BOB PILLIN puts it on and goes. PHYLLIS claps her hands.*]

MRS. LARNE and JOCK go out.

PHYLLIS. Good-bye, Guardy dear!

HEYTHORP. Fond of me?

PHYLLIS. Oh! Guardy, I adore you. I wish you'd come and see us oftener.

HEYTHORP. Well! I'll come to-morrow.

PHYLLIS. That'll be *lovely*.

[*She kisses him.*]

[*She goes out.*]

HEYTHORP. [*To himself*] Fresh as April—clean run stock. By George, I'll do it! [*FARNEY enters from the outer office.*]

FARNEY. Miss Heythorp is below, sir, with a carriage to take you home; she says she'll wait.

HEYTHORP. Deuce she is! Devil to pay!

FARNEY. And Mr. Joseph Pillin has just come in.

HEYTHORP. [*Sinking into his chair*] Bring him here! Don't want to be disturbed.

FARNEY. Very good, sir.

[*He waits for JOSEPH PILLIN to enter; then crosses and goes out into the inner office. JOSEPH PILLIN is a parchmenty, precise,*]

thin, nervous man, with slight grey whiskering, between seventy and eighty, in a fur coat and top hat.

JOE PILLIN. [*In his rather quavering voice*] Well, Sylvanus, I had your message.

HEYTHORP. Um, Joe! Have a cigar?

[He puts one in his own mouth, and lights it.]

JOE PILLIN. Cigar! You know I never smoke them. You've a monstrous constitution, Sylvanus. If I drank port and smoked cigars I should be in my grave in a fortnight. I'm getting old—growing nervous——

HEYTHORP. Always were as scary as an old hen, Joe. Sit down.

JOE PILLIN. Well, my nature's not like yours. About my ships. What news have you? I'm getting anxious. I want to retire. Freights are very depressed. I don't think they'll recover in my time. I've got my family to think of.

HEYTHORP. Crack on sail and go broke—buck you up like anything.

JOE PILLIN. Now, Sylvanus! You make a joke of everything. I'm quite serious.

HEYTHORP. Never knew you anything else, Joe.

JOE PILLIN. Hasn't your Board decided to-day? The sixty thousand I'm asking is a very small price for four good ships. [*OLD HEYTHORP looks at him deeply, twinkles, and blows a puff of smoke.*] Well, Sylvanus?

HEYTHORP. Make it worth my while, Joe, or it won't go through.

JOE PILLIN. Worth your while? [*Bending forward and lowering his voice.*] How do you mean—a commission? You could never disclose it.

HEYTHORP. Who wants to? I'll get you sixty thousand for your ships if you'll give me ten per cent. of it. If you don't—deal's off, Joe—not a brass rap.

JOE PILLIN. But it means coming down six thousand in my price.

HEYTHORP. Well, try elsewhere.

JOE PILLIN. But I have. There's no market at all.

HEYTHORP. Then take my offer.

JOE PILLIN. My dear Sylvanus—that's—that's positively cynical. A commission—it's not legal.

HEYTHORP. Not going to take a penny piece myself. I want you to settle it on some protégées of mine.

JOE PILLIN. [*In agitation*] But it's a breach of trust! I really can't be a party to a breach of trust. Suppose it came out.

HEYTHORP. Won't come out.

JOE PILLIN. Yes, yes, so you say; but you never know.

HEYTHORP. Nothing to prevent your executing a settlement on some third parties. Who's your lawyer?

JOE PILLIN. My lawyer? Scriven's my lawyer.

HEYTHORP. Well! Get him to draw up a deed poll to-morrow morning. Bring it to me here after the general meeting to-morrow afternoon. If the purchase goes through, you sign it; if it doesn't you tear it up. What stock have you got that gives four per cent?

JOE PILLIN. Midland Railway.

HEYTHORP. That'll do—you needn't sell, then.

JOE PILLIN. Yes; but who—who are these—these third parties?

HEYTHORP. Woman and her children—must make provision for 'em. [*At JOE PILLIN's expression.*] Afraid of being mixed up with a woman, Joe?

JOE PILLIN. Yes, you may laugh. I *am* afraid of being mixed up with someone else's woman. I don't like it—I don't like it at all. I've not led your life, Sylvanus.

HEYTHORP. Lucky for you—been dead long ago. Tell your lawyer it's an old flame of yours—you old dog.

JOE PILLIN. Yes, there it is at once, you see. I might be subject to blackmail.

HEYTHORP. Tell him to keep your name dark and just pay over the income quarterly.

JOE PILLIN. [*Rising*] I don't like it, Sylvanus—I don't really.

HEYTHORP. Then leave it and be hanged to you! But there'll be no deal, Joe.

JOE PILLIN. Is there no other way?

HEYTHORP. No. Matter must be settled to-morrow. And if I don't pitch it strong to the shareholders, the sale won't go through, that's flat.

JOE PILLIN. It's playing round the law, Sylvanus.

HEYTHORP. No law to prevent you doing what you like with your money. Taking nothing myself—not a mag. You assist the fatherless and widowed—just your line, Joe.

JOE PILLIN. What a fellow you are, Sylvanus! You don't seem capable of taking anything seriously.

HEYTHORP. Care killed the cat. Well?

JOE PILLIN. No, I—I don't think I can do it. Besides, such a sacrifice—six thousand pounds.

HEYTHORP. Very well! Get another bid if you can—freights'll go lower yet.

JOE PILLIN. Oh! do you think so?

HEYTHORP. Sure of it.

JOE PILLIN. Very well, Sylvanus, very well! I suppose I must.

HEYTHORP. Here's the name for your lawyer. Write it down.

[JOE PILLIN writes.]

Rosamund Larne—with an "e"—23 Millicent Villas, Liverpool, widow of Philip Larne, late of Dublin, barrister-at-law; income to her, until her children, Phyllis Larne and John Larne, attain the age of twenty-one or marry, then to said Phyllis and said John Larne in equal shares for life, remainder to their children. Got that? Get it drawn to-morrow morning.

JOE PILLIN. [*Raising himself*] It seems to me very irregular—very risky.

HEYTHORP. Go home and drink a bottle of champagne on it. Good-night, Joe. No deed, no deal! I'll trust you.

JOE PILLIN. Well, good-night, Sylvanus, good-night. You always were a dare-devil. [*He quavers to the door of the outer office.*] Good-night. [*He passes out.*]

HEYTHORP. [*To himself*] He'll jump. Better than beggary for 'em.

[*He sits back with a smile. Then closes his eyes as if in sleep.*

[*The door back Left is reopened and ADELA HEYTHORP, his daughter, comes in; a woman of thirty-two, with dark hair and thin, straight face and figure. She stands just in the room regarding him severely.*

ADELA. You really ought not to be so late, Father. It's most dangerous at this time of year. Are you ready, now?

HEYTHORP. [*Opening his eyes*] No.

ADELA. It's really terrible the way you neglect your health. I've noticed that every time you drink port, you do something dangerous the next day. In weather like this you ought always to get back before dark. And of course you eat much too much. One would think you were forty, instead of over eighty.

HEYTHORP. Not if they saw you.

ADELA. Really, Father, is that your idea of repartee? Who were your visitors?

HEYTHORP. Ladies and a boy.

ADELA. So I saw. They came to the house first. I know their name is Larne, but it conveyed nothing to me.

HEYTHORP. [*With a grin*] My daughter-in-law, and my grandchildren; that's all.

ADELA. That isn't a bit funny, either.

HEYTHORP. No, it's gospel truth.

ADELA. Then do you mean to say you were married before you married my mother?

HEYTHORP. No.

ADELA. Not married! I see. I suppose these people are hanging round your neck, then. I begin to understand your difficulties. Are there any more of them? [*OLD HEYTHORP makes a violent and ineffectual effort to rise.*] You'll hurt yourself. [*Seeing him motionless again.*] I suppose you don't realize that it's not an agreeable discovery. I don't know what to think——

HEYTHORP. Think what you like.

ADELA. Are you coming?

HEYTHORP. No.

ADELA. I can't keep this carriage any longer. You'll be late for dinner.

HEYTHORP. Dine in my own room in future. Tell Meller.

ADELA. I don't see why *you* should lose your temper.

HEYTHORP. Because I can't get up, you think you can stand there and worry me.

ADELA. Well, really, I've come especially to fetch you home, and you call it worrying.

HEYTHORP. Paddle my own canoe, thank you. [ADELA turns and goes out.] [To himself] Self-righteous cat! [He makes a slow and considered effort to rise, but fails, and sits motionless. He raps the table with a pen. There is no result. Reaching for an inkpot, he rams it on the table twice.]

[Two YOUNG CLERKS appear at the door, Right.]

HEYTHORP. You young gentlemen had forgotten me.

FIRST CLERK. Mr. Farney said you didn't want to be disturbed, sir.

HEYTHORP. Give me my hat and coat.

SECOND CLERK. Yes, sir.

[They come, raise him, and help him into hat and coat.]

HEYTHORP. Thank you. That carriage gone?

FIRST CLERK. [Crossing to window and looking out] Yes, sir.

HEYTHORP. All right. Tell Mr. Farney to come and see me at noon, about my speech for the General Meeting to-morrow.

FIRST CLERK. Yes, sir.

HEYTHORP. Good-night to you.

CLERKS. Good-night, sir.

[He passes like a tortoise to the door, Back, opens it feebly, and goes out.]

FIRST CLERK. Poor old Chairman, he's on his last.

SECOND CLERK. Gosh! He's a tough old hulk—he'll go down fighting. [Raising the window.] There he goes—slow as a barnacle. He's held the whole street up. Look—under

the lamp! [*The FIRST CLERK joins him at the window.*] I say—that was a near thing—that cart!

FIRST CLERK. He doesn't give a damn for anything.

SECOND CLERK. He's got his tram all right.

FIRST CLERK. See him raising his hat to that old woman—you'd think he'd got all night before him.

SECOND CLERK. Old school—what!

FIRST CLERK. He's got pluck, and he's got manners. Good "Old English"!

SECOND CLERK. There they go! Ting-a-ling!

[*He shuts the window down.*]

The curtain is lowered for a minute.

SCENE II

The same, converted to the purposes of the General Meeting. The three chairs back to the fire, on the Right, are those of OLD HEYTHORP and two fellow-Directors, of whom the first is on his feet. FARNEY stands by the Chairman, a little back of him. Facing them are four rows of five chairs each, with fourteen seated SHAREHOLDERS. At a small table, on the far Left, is a REPORTER. OLD HEYTHORP is finishing his Chairman's speech.

HEYTHORP. Come to this arrangement with Messrs. Pillin—owners of the four steamships, *Smyrna, Damascus, Tyre, and Sidon*—[*His voice is failing*—vessels in prime condition. . . .

MR. BUDGEN (A SHAREHOLDER). [*From the back*] Excuse me, sir, we can't hear a word down here.

HEYTHORP. With a total freight-carrying capacity of fifteen thousand tons. [THREE SHAREHOLDERS rise.]

MR. BUDGEN. We might as well go home. If the Chairman's got no voice can't somebody read for him?

[OLD HEYTHORP takes a sip of water and goes on, a little louder.]

HEYTHORP. At the low inclusive price of £60,000. Gentlemen, *Vestigia nulla retrorsum.*

SHAREHOLDER. Can't hear a word.

[OLD HEYTHORP hands his speech to FARNEY and sinks into his seat.

FARNEY. The Chairman has just said, "*Vestigia nulla retrorsum.*"

MR. BUDGEN. Yes, very convincing.

FARNEY. [Reading] "Times are bad, but they are touching bottom. I have said freights will go up. This is the moment for a forward stroke. With the utmost confidence we recommend your ratification of this purchase, which we believe will soon substantially increase the profits of the Company."

[FARNEY sits down and glances at OLD HEYTHORP, who nods to the DIRECTOR on his left.

DIRECTOR. [Rising and combing his beard with his fingers] Before moving the adoption of the Report, we welcome any comment from shareholders. [He sits down.

[TWO SHAREHOLDERS, one in the second, one in the third row, rise. OLD HEYTHORP nods at the one in the second row.

FARNEY. Mr. Brownbee.

MR. BROWNBEE. I should like, if I may be allowed, to congratulate the Board on having piloted our ship so smoothly through the troublous waters of the past year. ("Hear, hear!") With our worthy Chairman still at the helm, I have no doubt that, in spite of the still low, I might even say falling barometer, and the—er—unseasonable climacteric, we may rely on weathering the—er—storm. I confess that the present dividend of four per cent. is not one which satisfies—er—every aspiration; ("Hear, hear!") but speaking for myself, and I hope for others [He looks round], I recognize that in all the circumstances it is as much as we have the right to expect. ("No, no.") It is very gratifying to have these ample reserves; and by following the bold, but to my mind prudent, development which the Board proposes to make, we may reasonably, if not sanguinely, expect a more golden future. ("No, no!") A

shareholder keeps on saying, "No, no"—from that lack of confidence I should like to dissociate myself. Our Chairman, whose strategic wisdom has been proved on many a field, would not so strongly advocate the purchase of these Pillin ships without good reason. He well said "*Vestigia nulla retrorsum.*" I venture to think there can be no better motto for Englishmen. Ahem! Ahem! [He sits down.]

[The other SHAREHOLDER rises again. OLD HEYTHORP nods at him.]

FARNEY. Mr. Westgate.

MR. WESTGATE. [A breezy fellow] I want to know much more about this proposition to purchase these ships. I doubt its wisdom; I very much doubt it. To whom was the proposal first made?

HEYTHORP. To me, sir.

MR. WESTGATE. The Chairman says to him. Very well! But what I want to know is why are Pillins sellin', if freights are to go up as the Chairman prophesies.

HEYTHORP. Matter of opinion.

MR. WESTGATE. Quite so. And in my opinion they're goin' lower; and Pillins are right to sell. If that's so, we're wrong to buy. ("Hear, hear!") ("No, no!") Pillins are shrewd people.

HEYTHORP. They're rattled.

MR. WESTGATE. Business men! Rattled! I wonder what young Mr. Pillin there says to that.

BOB PILLIN. Er, I'm not in—er—a position to—er—state.

MR. WESTGATE. Well, that's not very conclusive. Perhaps you'll say I'm rattled too. [OLD HEYTHORP nods.] Well, rattled or not, I think it's a rash purchase in times like these. We're in the trough of the sea.

HEYTHORP. Always buy at the bottom of the market.

MR. WESTGATE. And who's to tell we're there? We're losin' our trade hand over hand. The Germans are buildin' us out o' house and home; and the Yanks are goin' ahead like the very devil.

HEYTHORP. The Old Country's sound enough.

MR. WESTGATE. Well, I can see no signs of it.

[A SHAREHOLDER in the front row rises.

FARNEY. Mr. Winkley.

MR. WINKLEY. [*Lean and cautious*] I agree, sir, with Mr. Westgate. I can see nothing in the present condition of shipping which calls for confidence. We are not a large company, and this proposed purchase will absorb at least two-thirds of our reserves. Beyond the dictum of the Chairman that freights will go up this year, where is the argument in favour of depleting ourselves in this way? I deprecate the proposal.

HEYTHORP. Any other shareholder anything to say before I put the Report to the meeting?

MR. BUDGEN. [*Rising*] Yes, sir. Mr. Westgate requires answering.

FARNEY. Name, please?

SHAREHOLDER. Budgen.

HEYTHORP. Mr. Budgen.

MR. BUDGEN. I don't like this business either. I don't impute anything to anybody, but I don't like the short notice we've 'ad, nor the way the thing's pressed on us. Not only that, but, to say truth, I'm not satisfied to be galloped over in this fashion by one who, whatever he may have been in the past, is now clearly not in his prime.

[*A certain sensation.* OLD HEYTHORP looks over his shoulder at FARNEY, who heaves him up from behind.

HEYTHORP. [*Voice low*] My best services have been at your disposal nineteen years; my experience of shipping is a little greater than that of the three gentlemen who spoke last. [*Voice suddenly rises.*] If I'm not in my prime, my brain's solid and my heart's stout. "There is a tide in the affairs of limited companies"—I'm not content to stagnate. If *you* want to stagnate, give your support to these gentlemen, and have done with it. But I repeat, freights will go up before the end of the year. The purchase is sound, more than sound—it's a dam' fine one; and I stand or fall by it. [*He sinks back into his seat.*

[*A pause. Then an old pink GENTLEMAN in the second row rises.*

FARNEY. Mr. Appleby.

MR. APPLEBY. It has been painful to me—painful—and I have no doubt to others, to hear an attack made on the Chairman. If he is old in body, he is young in mental vigour and courage. I wish we were all as young. We ought to support him, gentlemen; most certainly we ought to support him.

[*OLD HEYTHORP bows, and MR. APPLEBY bows and sits down.*

VENTNOR. [*Rising*] We don't want sentiment interfering with our judgment in this matter. The question is simply: How are our pockets to be affected? I came here with some misgiving. [*In a rather queer voice.*] I can't say I've lost it; but on the whole—I say on the whole—I favour the proposition. The ships are undoubtedly very cheap. We've got these reserves, and we might as well use them. [*A pause.*] The Chairman knows his way about. [*He sits down.*

HEYTHORP. Any more remarks? [*Heaved up.*] Very well, I move the adoption of the report and accounts.

MR. BROWNBEE. I second that.

HEYTHORP. Those in favour signify the same in the usual way.

[*Except MR. WESTGATE, MR. BUDGEN, and one other, all hold up their hands.*

HEYTHORP. Contrary?

[*MR. BUDGEN and the other hold up their hands. MR. WESTGATE does not.*

HEYTHORP. Carried. Only other business, gentlemen, is the election of a director in place of Mr. Popham who retires, and offers himself for re-election. Mr. Popham's not here to-day—indisposed. [*Voice going again.*] Very valuable director. Those in favour of his re-election? [*All hands are held up except MR. BROWNBEE'S and MR. WESTGATE'S.*] Contrary? [*No hands are held up.*] Carried. All the business, gentlemen.

[*The meeting breaks up. BOB PILLIN is first out of the room.*

[The DIRECTORS file out into the inner office. The REPORTER rises and comes to FARNEY.]

REPORTER. Name of the last speaker but one—Applepie, was it?

FARNEY. Appleby.

REPORTER. Oh! Haythorp—with an “a”?

FARNEY. “E.”

REPORTER. Oh! an “e.” He seems an old man. Thank you. Would you like to see a proof? With an “a” you said——?

FARNEY. “E.”

REPORTER. Oh! an “e.” Oh! Good afternoon!

FARNEY. [To MR. BROWNBEE, who is lingering] Fancy his not knowing how to spell the Chairman’s name after all these years! What does go on inside them?

MR. BROWNBEE. Indeed, yes. The Press is very peculiar—they seem to have no—no passions. I hope I was useful, Mr. Farney. That fellow Westgate was very unpleasant.

FARNEY. Yes, sir, he wants to come on the Board.

MR. BROWNBEE. [Who also does] Ah! Indeed! Ah! I see.

FARNEY. Yes, sir; always kicks up a fuss—hopes they’ll put him on to keep him quiet.

MR. BROWNBEE. Dear, dear! And will they?

FARNEY. [With a smile] Not while the Chairman lives, sir. He prefers the other way—services rendered.

MR. BROWNBEE. [Pleased] Ah-h! Yes, I’m glad to hear that. Yes. I suppose there isn’t a question of another director at the moment?

FARNEY. I believe not, sir. But, of course, it’s always the unexpected that happens.

MR. BROWNBEE. I know, I know. One must be prepared for everything. I thought that—er—well—that possibly I—I think the Chairman would favour me—— [Here he catches sight of VENTNOR, who has approached.] But this, perhaps, isn’t the moment. On the whole a pleasant meeting. Good afternoon!

[He goes, FARNEY looking after him with a smile. The room is now empty but for VENTNOR and FARNEY.]

VENTNOR. So he wants to get on the Board. The old fox! Can I see the Chairman, Mr. Farney?

[Before FARNEY can answer, a CLERK announces from the outer office: "MR. PILLIN, sir!" JOE PILLIN enters, nipped and yellow and wrapped to the nose in a fur coat. FARNEY goes into the inner office.]

VENTNOR. How de do, Mr. Pillin? I know your son. So we've bought your ships. Hope they'll do us some good. But I suppose you hope they won't, or you wouldn't have sold. One man's meat——

JOE PILLIN. Mr. Ventnor, I think? Thank you. Very cold, isn't it?

FARNEY. [Returning: to VENTNOR] Will you wait in here, sir? The Chairman will see you presently.

[VENTNOR goes into the outer office, and FARNEY follows him, as OLD HEYTHORP comes in.]

JOE PILLIN. [Quavering] Ah! Sylvanus? Aren't you perished?

HEYTHORP. What a quavering thread-paper of a chap you are, Joe! Take off your coat.

JOE PILLIN. I? I should be lost without my fur. You must have a fire inside you.

HEYTHORP. Sound innards, nothing more.

JOE PILLIN. [Nervously scrutinizing the closed doors] So—it's gone through, Sylvanus? It means a wretched price for me—wretched.

HEYTHORP. You may think yourself damned lucky, Joe. Brought that deed?

JOE PILLIN. [Nervously produces a parchment and unfolds it on the little table to show his signature] Yes. And I've—I've signed it. I don't like it—it's irrevocable. I can't bear irrevocable things. Never could. I consider you stampeded me, Sylvanus—playing on my nerves like that.

HEYTHORP. Your lawyer must think you a sad dog, Joe.

JOE PILLIN. Ah! suppose it comes to the knowledge of my wife at my death!

HEYTHORP. Nothing'll make you shiver then.

JOE PILLIN. Really! That's very bad taste, Sylvanus. Well, you've got your way, you always do. Who is this Mrs. Larne? It seems my son met them here yesterday. I thought at least nobody knew you were connected with them.

HEYTHORP. Mother of my grandchildren under the rose, Joe; and you've provided for 'em—best thing you ever did.

JOE PILLIN. [*Pocketing the deed*] Oh! I'm sorry you told me. It's worse than I thought. It's a clear breach of trust on your part—there's no question; and I'm conniving at it. As soon as the transfer of the ships is signed, I shall get away abroad. This cold's killing me. I wish you'd give me your recipe for keeping warm.

HEYTHORP. Get a new inside, and drink port.

JOE PILLIN. And yet, I suppose, with your full habit, your life hangs by a thread?

HEYTHORP. Stout one, my boy.

JOE PILLIN. Well, good-bye, Sylvanus. You're a Job's comforter. I must be getting home. I don't like it.

HEYTHORP. Then lump it.

[JOE PILLIN *puts on his hat, and goes*. FARNEY *enters*.

FARNEY. Will you see Mr. Ventnor now, sir?

[OLD HEYTHORP *nods*. VENTNOR *enters*.

VENTNOR. Things are looking up with you, Mr. Heythorp. [OLD HEYTHORP *looks at him deeply without reply*.] Your creditors put their tails between their legs yesterday, thanks to Mr. Brownbee. And you've carried your purchase through to-day—thanks to me.

HEYTHORP. Come to your point, sir, if you've got one.

VENTNOR. Oh! yes, I've got one. You had your way, Mr. Heythorp, but the meeting to-day might have turned very nasty. You rode roughshod; but, as you saw, I'm not the only one, by a long way, who feels that a Chairman ought to be in full

possession of his faculties. If the shareholders to-day had turned you down, where would you have been?

HEYTHORP. In the soup. But they didn't.

VENTNOR. No, they just didn't. But there wasn't much in it. I could have turned the scales against you instead of for. And if they'd thrown you over, your other companies would shelve you too. Your position, Mr. Heythorp, if I may say so, is precarious, in spite of the way you carry it off.

HEYTHORP. Will you come to the point, sir?

VENTNOR. Yes. It's this: Am I to make it more precarious?

HEYTHORP. How?

VENTNOR. By filing a petition for your bankruptcy. That would be quite enough to tip the beam.

HEYTHORP. File away!

VENTNOR. You won't pay me, then?

HEYTHORP. No.

VENTNOR. Is that wise, Mr. Heythorp—is it wise? Take time. Think it over. By the way, you put the case for that purchase very high, didn't you?

HEYTHORP. [*Looking at him steadily*] Not a bit too high. Freights have touched bottom—go up soon.

VENTNOR. D'you know what passed through my mind?

HEYTHORP. Not an idea.

VENTNOR. [*Smiling*] And you won't reconsider your refusal?

HEYTHORP. [*With rising choler*] You heard the sporting way they treated me yesterday. Let 'em down by giving you preference? Not for Joe!

VENTNOR. Mr. Heythorp, you've had your way all your life, I fancy——

HEYTHORP. Wish I had.

VENTNOR. And it's given you the idea that you can always have it. Well, Humpty Dumpty had a great fall—not all the King's horses nor all the King's men—remember the old rhyme?

HEYTHORP. You're good enough to be mysterious, sir.

VENTNOR. Once more, won't you reconsider——?

HEYTHORP. My answer's flat: I'll see you damned first.

VENTNOR. Very good, Mr. Heythorp! Very good indeed! To our next meeting, then. You've not heard the last of this. Good-day. *[He goes to the door.]*

HEYTHORP. Good-day to you! *[VENTNOR goes out.]*

HEYTHORP. *[To himself, rumbling]* That cur smells a rat. *[He moves very slowly to the inner office door and calls.]* Mr. Farney! *[FARNEY enters.]*

HEYTHORP. Bring me my hat and coat.

[FARNEY brings them.]
Get me a taxi-cab; tell the driver Millicent Villas; if he doesn't know it, let him ask.

FARNEY. Yes, sir. *[Helping him on with his coat.]*

HEYTHORP. That chap Ventnor. What's his holding?

FARNEY. Nothing to speak of, sir. Ten shares, I believe.

[He goes out. OLD HEYTHORP slowly puts on his hat.]

The curtain falls.

ACT II

The Larnes' small drawing-room at Millicent Villas, about three-thirty the same afternoon. A general effect of subdued disorder and chintz. A deep-cushioned sofa; a tea table with not only tea-things, but a liqueur bottle, glasses, and cigarette box on it. Water-colours by Mrs. Larne on the walls; an untidy bureau, Right. A cheerful fire, Left, and on the fender before it PHYLLIS drying her hair. A garden window, Right. A door, Back. MRS. LARNE, at her bureau in a negligée, is scribbling furiously and smoking a cigarette.

[Enter LETTY, the little maid-of-all-work.

LETTY. *[Holding out a bill to MRS. LARNE]* Gas, ma'am. And he's goin' to cut it off to-morrer.

MRS. LARNE. *[With a puff of smoke and a gesture of despair]* That man's incorrigible!

LETTY. The water's been, again.

MRS. LARNE. *[With dignity]* Next time he comes, I'll see him myself.

LETTY. Yes, ma'am—he ain't goin' away next time, 'e says, till you 'ave.

MRS. LARNE. Their impudence!

LETTY. Ah! 'e's a caution. Never knew such a man for not takin' no for an answer.

MRS. LARNE. *[With her laugh]* He'll take it from me, Letty.

LETTY. Yus, an' turn the water off. What for supper, please?

MRS. LARNE. Oh! something light. Use your wits.

LETTY. The cold bacon?

PHYLLIS. Ugh-h!

MRS. LARNE. *[Dreamily]* Yes! Delicious.

LETTY. There ain't nothin' else.

MRS. LARNE. *[Scribbling]* Exactly. Don't worry me.

LETTY. Laundry's comin' at six.

[MRS. LARNE *continues to scribble*; PHYLLIS, *drying her hair, pays sudden attention*.

PHYLLIS. The laundry, Mother. I must have my things back. I'm down to my last com.

MRS. LARNE. Tt, Tt! It'll be all right. Where's Jock?

LETTY. In the kitchen, ma'am—'e's thinkin'!

MRS. LARNE. Well, don't let him. [*Impressively*] And mind! He's not to come in here. I'm expecting Mr. Pillin at half-past. Go and dress, Letty.

LETTY. 'Im with the 'igh collar—same as yesterday?

MRS. LARNE. [*With her laugh*] Gracious! What a way of putting it. [PHYLLIS *sneezes*.

LETTY. Ain't your 'air dry, Miss?

PHYLLIS. No.

LETTY. Will you want tea, ma'am?

MRS. LARNE. [*Scribbling*] Of course!

LETTY. Shan't be able to bile no kettle to-morrer.

MRS. LARNE. Make tea while the gas burns. Run away, you awful little drumstick. I shall never get this article finished.

LETTY. I'll try and sneak one from the basket, miss, when 'er 'ead's turned-like. She won't leave nothin' if she ain't paid this time. [*She goes out*.

PHYLLIS. Mother!

MRS. LARNE. [*Conning*] "She had on black moiré, with teeny tucks and flounces, and a flame-coloured fillet. There was a *je ne sais quoi* in the general effect. Lady Baker, on the other hand——"

PHYLLIS. *Mother!*

MRS. LARNE. What?

PHYLLIS. That young man!

MRS. LARNE. Well, what about him?

PHYLLIS. It's horrible to borrow from people you've only seen once.

MRS. LARNE. Well! you're not going to, I hope.

PHYLLIS. No, but you are.

MRS. LARNE. Will you hold your tongue, you disrespectful gairl!

PHYLLIS. I can't, Mother. I hate it!

MRS. LARNE. There it is! I slave for you children, I beg for you. I wear myself to the bone——

PHYLLIS. Mother!

MRS. LARNE. [*With a large sigh, and her hand on her ample bosom*] Well, almost—yes, I can feel one rib. I never knew such ingratitude. “Lady Baker, on the other hand, filled the eye”—You’ve put it all out of my head—what did she fill the eye with? How do you think I’m to keep a roof over us?

PHYLLIS. I don’t want a roof kept over me by borrowing.

MRS. LARNE. [*Sarcastically*] Oh! no. Of course not!—“filled the eye with red velvet.”—There! I don’t know whether it was red velvet or not. I wonder [*musings*] is “red velvet” libellous? I write this stuff—I—I—an artist—It’s too hard! [*She wipes her eye with a tiny handkerchief.*]

PHYLLIS. [*Going to her*] Mother—don’t! I didn’t mean—only I do so loathe it. Father *was* a gentleman, wasn’t he?

MRS. LARNE. I suppose you mean I’m not a lady? ’Pon my word!

PHYLLIS. Oh! Mother, I *know* you’re descended from the Cornish kings. Well, I think we ought to live up to it. Look here, I’ll sell my hair.

MRS. LARNE. You’ll what? What d’you think you’d look like without your hair?

PHYLLIS. [*Darkly*] Like enough for *that* young man.

MRS. LARNE. I never met a gairl who said such things—never.

PHYLLIS. Well, of course, I know what he’s coming for. I won’t be a decoy duck, Mother. If you borrow from him, I’ll steal it from you, and pay it back. I will!

MRS. LARNE. Of all ungrateful little wretches!

[PHYLLIS *rubs her cheek against her mother’s.*]
No! Go away!

PHYLLIS. Mum, don’t be grumpy!

[*Her mother has taken out a little mirror, and is looking at herself. PHYLLIS takes a peep.*

PHYLLIS. [*Rubbing her own cheek*] Oh! it's come off on me.

MRS. LARNE. You little cat! [*The front door-bell is heard to ring.*] Good gracious, there he is! And look at me—look at me! [*She gathers herself up and swims to the door. Her voice is heard in the passage saying:*] Don't open, Letty, till I'm invisible.

[*PHYLLIS takes the little mirror to the window, for the light is failing, and rubs her cheek more vigorously. Through the open door she can hear voices.*

BOB PILLIN. Er—Mrs. Larne at home?

LETTY. Yes, sir—but she's invisible.

BOB PILLIN. Ha'r! I'm sorry.

LETTY. Miss Phyllis is at 'ome, sir.

BOB PILLIN. Er—her! Wonder if she'd see me?

LETTY. She's been washin' 'er 'air, but it may be dry be now. I'll see. [*LETTY enters. She is in black with an apron.*

LETTY. It's 'im, Miss. Will you see 'im?

PHYLLIS. Oh! Gefoozlem! In a jiff.

[*She hands LETTY the mirror, tears open the window, and disappears into the garden.*

LETTY. [*At the door*] Come in. She'll see you in a jiff. Oh! and Master Jock's loose, sir.

BOB PILLIN. [*Coming in*] Is he—ah!

[*LETTY takes his cane from him and gives him the little mirror, looks round, takes a towel from the fender, and retires.*

[*BOB PILLIN is beautifully dressed, with a narrow white piping round his waistcoat, a buttonhole of tuberoses, and his hat still in one hand. He stands uneasily twisting the little mirror, then lifts it and examines his face.*

PHYLLIS. [*Opening the door*] Oh! Conceited young man! [*Her hair is fluffed out on her shoulders, and the sight of it is almost too much for BOB PILLIN.*]

BOB PILLIN. I say, how topping!

PHYLLIS. [*Shaking her mane*] Lawks! It's awful. Have you come to see mother?

BOB PILLIN. Er-r—yes; I'm glad she's not here, though.

PHYLLIS. Don't be foolish! Sit down! [*She sits on the sofa and taps it; he sits beside her.*] Isn't washing one's head awful?

BOB PILLIN. Er—well! Of course, I haven't much experience.

PHYLLIS. I said head—not hair! [*A pause.*] Why do you know such frightful men?

BOB PILLIN. What! I don't know any frightful men.

PHYLLIS. You know that man who was at Guardy's yesterday—I saw you. He's a horror.

BOB PILLIN. Ventnor—oh! Well, I only just know him. What's the matter with him?

PHYLLIS. He's mother's lawyer. Mother doesn't mind him—but I think he's a beast.

BOB PILLIN. Why? What's he done?

PHYLLIS. It isn't what he's done. It's what he'd like to do. Isn't money horrible?

BOB PILLIN. Well, I don't know, I think money's rather a good thing.

PHYLLIS. Oh! do you? Well, you'd better take care of what you've got then, or you won't have it.

BOB PILLIN. [*Staring at her*] Look here, Miss Larne—er—Phyllis—look here!

PHYLLIS. Well, I'm looking.

BOB PILLIN. Isn't there something on your mind, or—or something?

PHYLLIS. [*Shaking her mane, then looking down*] I wish mother wouldn't—I hate it. Beastly!

BOB PILLIN. Really—I mean—if there's anything you want me to do.

PHYLLIS. Yes, go away before mother comes.

BOB PILLIN. Why?

PHYLLIS. Oh! you know. You've got eyes. Why d'you think you're here.

BOB PILLIN. Really—I don't know.

PHYLLIS. [*Scanning him*] I thought you were an up-to-date young man.

BOB PILLIN. [*Modestly—settling his tie*] Well—er—I've knocked about a bit.

PHYLLIS. It hasn't knocked the bloom off, has it?

BOB PILLIN. [*Taking out his buttonhole*] Ah! I say, do have these!

PHYLLIS. [*Wrinkling her nose*] Not for worlds.

BOB PILLIN. I think you might tell me what's the matter with you.

PHYLLIS. [*Almost fiercely*] Well, I will! Can't you see what a poky street we live in? We're always hard up.

BOB PILLIN. What a beastly shame!

PHYLLIS. Nobody can come here without—disgusting!

[*She turn away from him, almost in tears.*]

BOB PILLIN. I say! What is it?

PHYLLIS. Oh! if you can't see, I'm not going to tell you.

BOB PILLIN. Well, I'm damned!

PHYLLIS. [*Glancing through her lashes*] That's better!

BOB PILLIN. Look here! Er—Phyllis! I came here to see you.

PHYLLIS. [*Nodding, gravely*] Exactly!

BOB PILLIN. Do you object—really—I wouldn't for the world do anything you don't like.

PHYLLIS. Then you'd better go, or you will. [*She sneezes.*] My hair isn't a bit dry. [*She sits on the fender again before the fire.*] Well! Aren't you going?

BOB PILLIN. You don't really mean it, do you?

[*He breathes with rising emotion.*]

PHYLLIS. [*After a pause*] Oh! don't breathe so loud!

BOB PILLIN. [*Indignant*] Breathe! I wasn't breathing.

PHYLLIS. You were.

BOB PILLIN. I wasn't—— Well, I can stand anything from you. You see I've taken the knock.

PHYLLIS. What! Where?

BOB PILLIN. [*Touching his breast pocket*] Here.

PHYLLIS. Oh! Does it hurt?

BOB PILLIN. Yes, awfully. It kept me awake all last night.

PHYLLIS. That's why you look so woolly.

BOB PILLIN. You're making it rather hard for me, aren't you? You see I've seen a good deal of—er—life.

PHYLLIS. Oh! *Do* tell me!

BOB PILLIN. Well, er—no—I think—not.

PHYLLIS. That's mean.

BOB PILLIN. What I meant was that—er—seeing—er—you is so different. I mean it's like—er—going out of a—er—into a—er.

PHYLLIS. [*Softly*] Poor young man!

BOB PILLIN. Look here! What I came to say chiefly was: Will you all come to the theatre with me to-morrow night? I've got a box.

PHYLLIS. [*Jumping up and clapping her hands*] What larks! We jolly well will! That is, if—I say, d'you mind—I *must* just go and see that my white petticoat—[*Stops at the door.*] You see, the laundress is an awful beast. She *will* be paid.

[*She runs out.*]

[BOB PILLIN *waits ecstatically. It is not PHYLLIS, however, who comes back, but MRS. LARNE, richly attired, and breathing perfume.*]

MRS. LARNE. [*Greeting him*] Ah! Has my naughty gairl been making you comfortable, Mr. Pillin?

BOB PILLIN. Ha'r! Oh! Quite!

MRS. LARNE. Do you really want us to go to the theatre to-morrow? How nice of you! I should have loved it, but—[*Motioning him to the sofa.*] Come and sit down. We poor Bohemians, my dear young man, you can't conceive how we live from hand to mouth. Just imagine—that poor gairl of mine hasn't anything to go in. D'you know, I simply don't know where to turn. [*With a heavy sigh.*] An artist can't be business-like, and put by for this, that, and the other. And they take such advantage of one. You know those Midland Syndicate

people—No, of course you don't—you're one of those rich young men who own ships and things, aren't you?

BOB PILLIN. Well, my father does—as a matter of fact, we've just sold our ships.

MRS. LARNE. How delightful! What a lovely lot of money you must have! [*Absent-mindedly taking his hand and putting it to her head and heart.*] My poor ships are all here and here, and they don't sell—isn't it tragic? And that gairl of mine absolutely adores the theatre. If I only had the price of a dress for her on me, as the dear old cabbies say. Of course I should be in rags, myself. And in a box—everybody sees you. Still, you wouldn't mind that. But my lovely gairl—because she is lovely, isn't she?

BOB PILLIN. [*More and more hypnotized*] But I say, you know, if it's only that——

MRS. LARNE. *Only!* If you knew how rich that sounds! I can't bear money—it's in my blood, I suppose. And yet, you know, every day I find it more and more impossible to live without it.

BOB PILLIN. But, Mrs. Larne—look here—you know, I mean—what's money. [*He dives his hands into his breast pocket.*]

MRS. LARNE. [*Apparently oblivious*] You see, I never can help paying my debts. It's almost a disease with me; hereditary. [*Watching out of the corner of her eye the slow, mesmerized appearance of a cheque-book.*] My dear young man, whatever's that?

BOB PILLIN. Oh!—er—I thought perhaps—but of course, if you——

MRS. LARNE. If you only knew what it was to see a cheque-book with so many cheques in it! It gives me the most perfect feeling, here. [*She lays her hand on her heart.*]

BOB PILLIN. Then won't you let me—er——

[*But during the foregoing PHYLLIS has softly opened the door, Back, and appears, pushing JOCK before her. He ducks and creeps on hands and feet to the sofa; then raises himself suddenly till his face appears over the top like a full moon between his mother and*

BOB PILLIN. BOB PILLIN drops the cheque-book and his mouth falls open. MRS. LARNE clasps her bosom.

MRS. LARNE. You awful boy! How dare you?

[She turns and sees PHYLLIS. BOB PILLIN also turns, and sheepishly pockets the cheque-book. PHYLLIS comes circling round to the fire and stands with her back to it, eyeing them. MRS. LARNE has nipped JOCK by the ear.]

MRS. LARNE. This boy of mine will be the death of us, Mr. Pillin.

JOCK. I say—that hurts!

MRS. LARNE. [Smoothly] I mean it to.

PHYLLIS. [Meaningly] Mother, I put him up to it.

MRS. LARNE. [Releasing JOCK, and with a gesture of despair] Well, I give it up. When I'm dead of work and anxiety, you'll both be sorry. [To BOB PILLIN] Are we going to have supper before or after, Mr. Pillin?

BOB PILLIN. Oh!—er—both—don't you think? Er—her!

JOCK. I say, you are a topper! Have some toffee?

[He holds out a substance.]

PHYLLIS. Look out, young man; it looks exactly like, but it's beeswax.

BOB PILLIN. [Gazing at it] Oh! I say!

[JOCK jabs it promptly into his opened mouth, and flies. He is met at the door, however, by LETTY.]

LETTY. Mr. Aesop.

[OLD HEYTHORP, slow as fate, in his overcoat, hat in hand, advances into the room, and the boy JOCK backs before him, bowing low, as to an idol. MRS. LARNE hastens to greet him, PHYLLIS too. BOB PILLIN, risen, is removing beeswax.]

LETTY. [Sotto voce] Kettle's bilin'.

MRS. LARNE. [Majestically] Tea, Letty.

[They settle OLD HEYTHORP on the sofa, whence he stares up at BOB PILLIN, and gives him a curt nod.]

BOB PILLIN. How are you, sir? Saw you at the meeting.

HEYTHORP. How did you come here?

BOB PILLIN. [Disconcerted] Oh!—er—just dropped in.

MRS. LARNE. Guardy dear, you *must* try our new liqueur. Jock, get Guardy a glass.

[*The boy JOCK, having put a glass to his eye, fills it rapidly.*]

MRS. LARNE. You horrible boy! You could see that glass has been used.

JOCK. Oh! sorry, Mother. *I'll* get rid of it.

[*He drinks off the liqueur.*]

MRS. LARNE. [*Laughing*] Guardy, what am I to do with him?

[*PHYLLIS, who has taken JOCK by the ear to lead him from the room, suddenly drops him with a squeal and clasps her hand to her arm. He has run a pin into her. BOB PILLIN hastens to her.*]

MRS. LARNE. Aren't those children awful? [*Lowering her voice.*] Jock takes after you terribly, Guardy. Jock, come here. Look at the shape of his head.

[*The boy JOCK approaches and stands seraphically gazing at OLD HEYTHORP. He is seized by feigned terror and, falling on to the stool before the fire, sits there grinning and cross-legged with his eyes fixed on OLD HEYTHORP.*]

MRS. LARNE. He has absolutely no reverence. Jock, take Mr. Pillin and show him your rats. And Phyllis, do hurry up the tea, there's a dear girl. [*At the word "Rats" Jock has risen.*]

JOCK. Oh! ah! Come on! They only bite if you worry them. You needn't worry them if you don't like.

[*BOB PILLIN, seeing that PHYLLIS is leaving the room, follows JOCK out.*]

HEYTHORP. Making up to that young pup, are you?

MRS. LARNE. He's such a nice fellow. We like him ever so. Guardy, I'm sure your coming means good news.

HEYTHORP. Settled six thousand on the children.

MRS. LARNE. Guardy! [*She becomes thoughtful.*] On the children——?

HEYTHORP. Yes. *You* can't blow it, so don't try!

MRS. LARNE. How unkind! As if——!

HEYTHORP. Scriven, the lawyer, will pay you the income

till they come of age or marry. Sixty pounds a quarter. Now! *Ask no questions—not a word to anyone.*

MRS. LARNE. Of course not! But—quarterly—when will the first——?

HEYTHORP. Lady Day.

MRS. LARNE. Nearly six weeks? This isn't in place of the three hundred you give us, Guardy?

HEYTHORP. No—additional.

MRS. LARNE. How sweet of you!

HEYTHORP. Humbug!

MRS. LARNE. Guardy!

HEYTHORP. About young Pillin. She mustn't be grabbed up by any fool who comes along.

MRS. LARNE. Oh! the dear girl is *much* too young. He's quite harmless; a nice simple fellow.

HEYTHORP. Drop him! Not a word of this settlement to anyone.

MRS. LARNE. N-no, Guardy. But I am so pressed. Couldn't I have twenty-five in advance? [*OLD HEYTHORP shakes his head; she throws up her hands in despair, but as LETTY comes in with the tea, followed by PHYLLIS, a thought strikes her.*] Come and give Guardy tea, Phyllis. I've forgotten something; I must just telephone.

PHYLLIS. Can't I, Mother?

MRS. LARNE. No; Guardy wants you. Back in a minute. [*She goes out behind LETTY.*]

PHYLLIS. [*At the tea table*] Tea, Guardy? [*OLD HEYTHORP shakes his head.*] D'you mind if I do? I've been washing my hair, it makes you frightfully hungry. [*Uncovering a dish.*] Geewhiz! Crumpets! Guardy, just one crumpet? [*OLD HEYTHORP shakes his head.*] [*Filling her mouth with a crumpet*] Scrummy! Lucky Jock didn't know. Was our dad like Jock? Mother's always so mysterious about him. I suppose you knew *his* father well? [*She sits down beside him on the sofa.*]

HEYTHORP. Man about London in my day.

PHYLLIS. Oh! your day must have been jolly. Did you wear peg-top trousers, and Dundrearys, and ride in the Row? [OLD HEYTHORP *nods.*] What larks! And I suppose you had lots of adventures with opera dancers and gambling? The young men are all so good now. That young man, for instance, is a perfect stick of goodness. [OLD HEYTHORP *grunts.*] You wouldn't know how good he was unless you'd sat next him going through a tunnel. Yesterday, coming home with us, he had his waist squeezed, and he simply sat still. And then, when the tunnel ended, it was Jock, after all, not me. His face was—— Oh! ah! ha, ha! he! [OLD HEYTHORP *contemplates her charming throat, thrown back in laughter, with a sort of pride in his face.*] He likes to pretend, of course, that he's fearfully lively. He's going to take us to the theatre to-morrow night, and give us *two* suppers. Won't it be lummy? Only [With a sigh] I haven't anything to go in. [OLD HEYTHORP *begins to fumble in his breast pocket.*]

PHYLLIS. Isn't money beastly, Guardy? If one could put out a plate over night and have just enough in the morning to use during the day!

HEYTHORP. [*Fumbling out a note and putting it in her lap*] Little present for you—buy a dress—don't tell your mother.

PHYLLIS. Ten pounds! How lovely! You *are* a chook. [*She throws her arms round him, and bobs her lips against his nose. Sitting back and contemplating him.*] To-morrow's Valentine's Day. Guardy, you've got the grand manner. Do tell me about that Yankee. *Where* did you wing him.

HEYTHORP. At Dieppe.

PHYLLIS. No, but where *on* him?

HEYTHORP. Where he couldn't sit down afterwards.

PHYLLIS. Was he turning his back?

HEYTHORP. Side view.

PHYLLIS. Oh! Yes, of course! Why did you fight the duel?

HEYTHORP. Said old England was played out.

PHYLLIS. Fifty years ago? [OLD HEYTHORP *nods*.] But, she's still full of beans, isn't she?

HEYTHORP. And always will be.

PHYLLIS. That's what I think—look at Jock, for instance. [OLD HEYTHORP *looks at her instead*.] Why d'you look at me like that, Guardy?

HEYTHORP. You're more like your father than Jock. Listen! When you come of age, you'll have a hundred and twenty a year of your own that you can't get rid of. Don't ever be persuaded into doing what you don't want. Don't marry a fool for his money. And remember: your mother's a sieve—no good giving her anything; keep what you'll get for yourself—only a pittance, you'll want it all, every mag.

PHYLLIS. Mother's a darling, really, Guardy.

HEYTHORP. H'm! I daresay. Only one thing in life matters—independence. Lose that, lose everything. Get old like me, you'll find that out. Keep your independence—only value of money. And—that young pup—'ware fools! Help me up!

[PHYLLIS *helps him up and puts his hat on her own head; it comes down right over the ears*.]

PHYLLIS. [Enchanted] Oh! Guardy! What a whopper! You *must* have a big head! They're all so small now. I shall marry someone with a head like yours. [Pensively] I do wonder about that young man. I bet he's got the dead rat down his back by now. And isn't it nifty! Jock was keeping it for something special. [She wrinkles her nose and plants the hat on OLD HEYTHORP.] Why! It only just goes on. *Must* you go? I do love you to come. [With a sudden warm impulse] And I do love you altogether! [She trembles up close to him.]

HEYTHORP. [Patting her cheek] That's right! Be a good girl. And don't tell your mother what I've been saying. Shall enjoy my dinner to-night.

PHYLLIS. Don't you always? I always think of you having *such* a good dinner. You look like it, you know.

HEYTHORP. Got a daughter. Mustn't eat, mustn't drink! Always at me.

PHYLLIS. Oh! yes, we saw her in the distance. She looked too good for anything.

HEYTHORP. That's the trouble.

PHYLLIS. Is she married?

HEYTHORP. No.

PHYLLIS. Why not?

HEYTHORP. Too holy.

PHYLLIS. [*At the window*] I thought so—Jock's pinned it to his coat behind, and he can't tell [*Fingers pinching her nose*] where it's coming from. Oh! poor young man! Oh, well, that's all right! He's safe for to-day—nobody'll be able to go near him. They're coming in. Guardy, would you mind taking him away with you in your cab—you can smoke a cigar, you know. I'll light it for you. [*She feels in his pockets, finds his cigar case, gives him a cigar and lights it.*] There! It's a good strong cigar. [*At the window.*] Oh! he's found it out. There it goes, over the wall! Thank goodness! Now, look out, smoke! [*She dives for a cigarette from the table and lights it.*] Good-bye, Guardy darling, I'm off. I know that rat.

[*She sidles to the door as BOB PILLIN comes in.*]

HEYTHORP. Give you a lift if you're going my way.

BOB PILLIN. [*Looking at PHYLLIS*] Well, sir, I wasn't thinking of—

PHYLLIS. Oh! yes, he is. Guardy; he is.

BOB PILLIN. [*Taken aback*] Oh! ah! Tha-anks, then.

[*PHYLLIS vanishes.*]

HEYTHORP. Make the most of your opportunities, I see.

BOB PILLIN. I—I don't know what you mean, sir. Mrs. Larne is very kind.

HEYTHORP. No doubt. Don't try and pick the flowers that's all.

BOB PILLIN. [*With some dignity*] Are you a relative of theirs, sir? [*OLD HEYTHORP nods.*] I quite understand what you mean. But I should like to know what your objection to me is.

HEYTHORP. Milk-and-water masquerading as port wine.

BOB PILLIN. [*Outraged*] Awfully sorry, sir, if you don't

think I'm wild enough. Anything I can do for you in that line—be most happy. I—er—know I'm not in debt, no entanglements, got a decent income, pretty good expectations and that; but I can soon put that all right, if I'm not fit without.

HEYTHORP. [*After a silence during which he puffs sturdily*] Fatter, but no more sand than your father.

[*He leads out, and BOB PILLIN, hypnotized by such very plain speech, is following, when MRS. LARNE enters.*

MRS. LARNE. Oh! are you going, Guardy? [HEYTHORP nods.] And you, Mr. Pillin—we haven't half——

BOB PILLIN. Awfully sorry—find I've got to. I'll send you a line about to-morrow.

[*MRS. LARNE is almost securing his lappel, when her nose apprehends something, and she refrains. BOB PILLIN slides out behind OLD HEYTHORP.*

MRS. LARNE. [*To herself*] Dear me! what a peculiar——! [*She wrinkles her nose, then goes to her bureau, sits down, sighs profoundly, and takes up her pen.*] “With red velvet. The gathering was brilliant in the extreme.” Oh, dear! What lies the papers do tell! [PHYLLIS enters.] Ah! there you are, you naughty gairl. I've just telephoned to my lawyer to come round.

PHYLLIS. That horrid man! What d'you want him for, Mother?

MRS. LARNE. What do I want him for? What do I want any man for? Money—Money.

PHYLLIS. I wish Jock hadn't wasted that rat. I'm sure he's a beast.

MRS. LARNE. Now, Phyllis! I won't have you call him names. He's very nice for a lawyer. If *he* can't get me some money, we shall all have to go to the workhouse. I want you to be extra sweet to him.

PHYLLIS. Well, I can't.

MRS. LARNE. Then you'd better go upstairs.

PHYLLIS. I will when he comes. If he pretends to be nice—I know what it'll mean.

MRS. LARNE. And what is that?

PHYLLIS. That you're what he calls "a fine woman." Ugh! He's a horrid man!

MRS. LARNE. Can I help it if people admire me?

PHYLLIS. Of course we all admire you. Only *that* sort of man! I'm sure he never does anything for nothing.

MRS. LARNE. You're getting very knowing. [*With some dignity*] As a matter of fact, Guardy gave me some news, and I expect to be able to—er—use it for our benefit.

PHYLLIS. Guardy told *me*, too, Mother.

MRS. LARNE. Oh! What?

PHYLLIS. That I shall have some money when I come of age, and that I wasn't to give—— But, Mummy, anything I ever have of course you'll have half.

MRS. LARNE. [*Putting out her hand*] Darling, I know. But by then there won't be any Mummy—she'll have wasted away. [*She sighs heavily.*] Never mind!

"La vic est brève, un peu d'amour,
Un peu de rêve, et puis bonjour!"

I wonder if I could work that in! [*Takes up her pen.*

PHYLLIS. [*Producing the ten pound note, with a sigh*] Mum! Guardy gave me this to buy a dress. Would you like it?

MRS. LARNE. [*Touched*] Ducky! No! Waste it on those wretched tradesmen? You get yourself a lovely frock.

PHYLLIS. Oh! I said you were a darling! [*Kisses her nose.*

MRS. LARNE. Listen! I believe that's his cab. Now, Phyllis, this is a crisis, and you must help me.

PHYLLIS. [*Regarding her*] Mother, I believe you love a crisis.

MRS. LARNE. Just open the door a weeny bit.

PHYLLIS. [*Doing so*] Why?

MRS. LARNE. Hssh!

VENTNOR'S voice without: Mrs. Larne at home?

MRS. LARNE. [*Under her breath*] It is.

LETTY'S voice: Can't say yet, depends on 'oo you are.

VENTNOR'S voice: I think she is, young woman.

LETTY'S voice: Are you about the water?

MRS. LARNE. [*Under her breath*] That awful little drumstick!

VENTNOR'S voice: Mr. Charles Ventnor, say! Give her this card!

LETTY'S voice: Just wait outside the door, will yer?

[MRS. LARNE, *throwing up her hands, goes to the door.*

MRS. LARNE. Oh! Is that you, Mr. Ventnor? Do come in. [VENTNOR *appears, hat in hand.*] Phyllis, dear, Mr. Ventnor. [VENTNOR *bows smilingly, PHYLLIS nods.*] That appalling little drumstick of mine has got water on the brain. Such a faithful little soul! We Bohemians, you know, Mr. Ventnor——

VENTNOR. Precisely!

MRS. LARNE. Do sit down. [*He sits on the sofa.*] Tea?—But I'm afraid it's cold. A glass of liqueur—it's really quite nice, and rather original in the afternoon, don't you think? [*Handing him a glass.*] And do smoke; we smoke everywhere. Even that naughty gairl of mine smokes.

VENTNOR. No, thanks. [*Tasting the liqueur.*] Very good tippie, Mrs. Larne. I came at some little inconvenience, so perhaps—— [*He glances at PHYLLIS.*

PHYLLIS. All right! [*She goes out without a look back.*

MRS. LARNE. [*Sitting down on the sofa beside him*] She's so abrupt, dear child. In my young days——

VENTNOR. [*Gallantly*] Your young days, Mrs. Larne. And what are these? But now—what is it?

MRS. LARNE. Well, as you know, my affairs are very embarrassed; but to-day I had some splendid news. A settlement has been made upon us—perfect Godsend, Mr. Ventnor, in the nick of time. Only of course I shan't get any interest from it till Lady Day. And, you see, I simply must have fifty pounds now—so I thought you would be so kind as to advance that on the security of this interest, charging, of course, what you like. It's quite ridiculous, but to-morrow I shall be without gas or coals, and probably have my furniture seized for rates. They are so hasty and unreasonable.

VENTNOR. [*Dubiously*] Settlement?

MRS. LARNE. Yes, I receive the income quarterly till my children are of age.

VENTNOR. How much?

MRS. LARNE. Six thousand pounds.

VENTNOR. Oh! [*Pricking his ears.*] Who made it?

MRS. LARNE. Ah! well—that I'm *not* supposed to tell you.

VENTNOR. Six thousand—— [*To himself*] Sixty thousand—ten per cent——!

MRS. LARNE. Oh! no, not six thousand a year—that would be too heavenly; six thousand altogether.

VENTNOR. Quite!

MRS. LARNE. You can verify everything for yourself, of course. The lawyers are Messrs. Scriven.

VENTNOR. Not Crow & Donkin?

MRS. LARNE. No, the name was Scriven. Aren't they lawyers?

VENTNOR. Oh! certainly—very good firm. Very interesting news, Mrs. Larne. I thought Crow & Donkin because—— [*Suddenly looking at her*] they're old Mr. Heythorp's solicitors.

MRS. LARNE. Ah! but you see I promised not to mention any names, except of course the solicitor's. If I didn't mention him, I could hardly expect you to lend me the money, could I?

VENTNOR. Afraid I must ask you to be more frank, Mrs. Larne. Mr. Heythorp *is* your late husband's father?

MRS. LARNE. Why? How *did* you know that?

VENTNOR. When you first came to see me, you spoke of his being behind you—remember? I confess I originally had a—— [*With a look.*] Well! a rather more intimate theory, but that didn't tally with my inquiries in Dublin.

MRS. LARNE. [*Flattering*] What a terrible man!

VENTNOR. Ah! We lawyers, Mrs. Larne, like to know something about our clients. So "Old English" has been to see you this——

MRS. LARNE. What a nose you have!

VENTNOR. Exactly! [*Sniffing.*] Cigar—not long gone!

MRS. LARNE. Wonderful! It's quite like that great criminal—Sherlock Holmes.

VENTNOR. So you want fifty pounds, Mrs. Larne.

MRS. LARNE. Unless you *could* manage to make it a hundred.

VENTNOR. First you've heard of this settlement? Scriven?
[Suddenly] Do you know a Mr. Pillin?

MRS. LARNE. Of course, we met him yesterday while you were there! Delightful young man, so cheery.

VENTNOR. [Slyly] Very different from his father, isn't he?

MRS. LARNE. Oh! We don't know his father. Do tell me—they're rich people, aren't they?

VENTNOR. Ye-es, warm man, old Pillin. Young Pillin's a lucky fellow—only son.

MRS. LARNE. [Dreamily] How right!

VENTNOR. [Clutching his chest] I've got it!

MRS. LARNE. Oh! have you? [Putting out her hand.]
Even if it's only fifty, it'll be my salvation.

VENTNOR. [With a laugh] No, no, Mrs. Larne; no, no!

MRS. LARNE. But you said you'd got it.

VENTNOR. I don't carry fifty pounds about with me. [With a peculiar look at her.] Unless I know I've got a use for it. I must ask you to give me a little note to Scriven.

MRS. LARNE. Oh! of course.

[She goes to her bureau and writes at his dictation.

VENTNOR. [Dictating]

“DEAR SIR,—Will you be so good as to give my lawyer, Mr. Charles Ventnor, details of the settlement of six thousand pounds just made on my children and myself, that he may have record of the matter.—Yours faithfully, etc.”

Just pin your card. I'll go and see them first thing to-morrow—know 'em quite well. If it's all right, you shall have the money; and I won't charge you a penny.

MRS. LARNE. Oh! but—how unusual!

VENTNOR. Not at all! Very glad to render you the little service. Hope it won't be the last. [While she finishes writing

and pins her card, he moves down to the fire, rubbing his hands; to himself, softly.] Got the old rascal! Neat—oh, neat!

MRS. LARNE. [*Finishing*] There! Such a relief! [*Sniffing.*] Dear me! There's that——! [*Sniffing.*] You don't smell a rat, do you? [VENTNOR *looks round at her, startled.*] It's my dreadful boy. He keeps them too long sometimes. [*Handing him the letter.*] I suppose you couldn't see Scriven's to-night?

VENTNOR. [*Looking at his watch*] Too late, Mrs. Larne, I'm afraid; but if you'll add a postscript, you shall have the money by special messenger to-morrow.

[MRS. LARNE *writes at his dictation.*

VENTNOR. "I shall further be glad if you will pay Mr. Ventnor the first fifty pounds of interest when you receive it, in satisfaction of that sum advanced by him." [*Taking the letter again.*] And now I must be off.

MRS. LARNE. [*Rising*] It *was* good of you to come. I feel so different. Could I have just five pounds?

VENTNOR. [*A little taken aback*] Er—well—Oh! yes, certainly.

MRS. LARNE. [*Taking the note*] How chivalrous!

VENTNOR. Not a bit, not a bit! [*He holds her hand impressively, and looks into her eyes.*] You know, my dear Mrs. Larne, I am very much at your service. Your humble admirer—— [*While, carried away by sudden fervour and general perfume, he presses closer, the door is opened by PHYLLIS, who stands there with BOB PILLIN behind her.*] And if you—if you liked, you need have no more money troubles, I assure you.

MRS. LARNE. [*Not yet aware of the door*] But how wonderful!

PHYLLIS. The laundress is here.

MRS. LARNE. Oh! how provoking. I must just see her. Good-bye, Mr. Ventnor! [*Seeing BOB PILLIN.*] Why, my dear young man, I thought you'd gone!

PHYLLIS. [*With meaning*] He came back for his stick. [*As her mother goes, to BOB PILLIN in a low voice, and pointing her chin at VENTNOR.*] That's your friend.

[She crosses to the fire, takes BOB PILLIN's cane, and holds it out to him by the end. BOB PILLIN takes it; and suddenly, as if moved by some force outside himself, he stretches it out and taps VENTNOR, who is just going through the doorway, on the shoulder. The latter turns sharply. PHYLLIS is at the fire glaring at him. BOB PILLIN is consulting her eyes.]

BOB PILLIN. Hold on a minute!

VENTNOR. What's that?

BOB PILLIN. How's Mrs. Ventnor to-day?

VENTNOR. [Sullenly] Perfectly well.

BOB PILLIN. [Gazing at PHYLLIS and still moved by her face]
It's a bit thick!

VENTNOR. It's what?

BOB PILLIN. [More and more moved] Ye-es. And—er—I want an explanation, don't you know.

VENTNOR. Do you? Well, you won't get it.

[BOB PILLIN stands nonplussed.]

PHYLLIS. [Low] Go on!

BOB PILLIN. I have the honour to be—er—be a—a friend here. And, look here, Ventnor, it's—it's not the conduct of a gentleman.

VENTNOR. [Angrily] You young——! Mind your own business, will you?

BOB PILLIN. I'm going to.

PHYLLIS. Good!

BOB PILLIN. And I won't have it. It's not the thing.

VENTNOR. You—you won't have it! Indeed! Now I tell you what, you'd better not exasperate me, you [Glancing angrily from BOB to PHYLLIS] moonstruck young calf!

BOB PILLIN. [With real resolution] Phyllis, shall I shift him?

PHYLLIS. Yes.

BOB PILLIN. Clear, Ventnor! And don't come again.

VENTNOR. By George! The impudence! I'll bring the whole pack of cards about your ears, young cock!

BOB PILLIN. Out? [Advancing on him.] Going? Once—twice—for the last time——!

VENTNOR. [*Goes, turning in the doorway*] You wait and see which boot the leg is on! [BOB PILLIN *closes the door.*]

BOB PILLIN. Phew! What a scorcher!

PHYLLIS. [*Impulsively giving him her hand*] You've got ever so much more sand than I thought.

BOB PILLIN. [*Humbly*] Might I—I kiss it?

PHYLLIS. All right. It's generally dirty. [BOB PILLIN *kisses it.*] [*Drawing it away.*] Mother hated it. Beastly man—you do understand that mother hated it!

BOB PILLIN. Of course! *Of course!*

PHYLLIS. But you'd better go before she comes.

BOB PILLIN. [*Blankly*] Well, I suppose I must go some time. I couldn't— [*Approaching her face.*] Could I?

PHYLLIS. No.

BOB PILLIN. Well, I mean to say that—er—I shall dream about it.

PHYLLIS. I don't mind. Ta-ta!

[*She waves her hand. He backs hypnotized towards the door and vanishes. PHYLLIS turns to the fire, with a sneeze, and runs her hands through her hair.*]

MRS. LARNE. [*Entering*] Well, that's that! The impudent woman took it nearly all.

PHYLLIS. Has she left my white petticoat, Mother, and my—

MRS. LARNE. Everything. [*Sitting at her bureau.*] Have they gone?

PHYLLIS. Um!

MRS. LARNE. [*Considering*] “La vie est brève, un peu d'amour.” Life is brief, a little love! Perhaps it is a bit cynical for the *Liverpool Pilot*.

The curtain falls.

ACT III

SCENE I

OLD HEYTHORP's sanctum in his daughter's house—a cosy room, with oil paintings, deep armchairs, and red curtains. OLD HEYTHORP, in a plum-coloured velvet smoking-jacket, is sitting before the log fire, Right, reading the "*Morning Post*." On a little table, close to him, is a reading lamp, a bell, and a card. A little pink letter has dropped to the floor. There are two doors on the Left—one to the hall, one to his bedroom—and a window at the Back looking over an open space with trees. It is about five in the afternoon.

[*The door is opened quietly and ADELA HEYTHORP comes in.*

ADELA. Well, Father, are you going to keep to that absurd idea of dining here in future—giving twice the trouble? [OLD HEYTHORP looks round at her with the white hairs on his lower lip bristling.] I'm going out to-night: I shall have something light early, so it doesn't matter—but I do hope by to-morrow you'll feel more sociable. It looks so bad.

[OLD HEYTHORP resumes his paper. She takes up the card from the little table. It is large and has a naked Cupid.

ADELA. Cupid! With nothing on—not even a quiver. [Reading.] "To be your Valentine."

[*She picks up the little pink letter and reads, ironically:*

"DEAREST GUARDY,—I'm sorry this is such a mangy valentine. I stayed in bed for breakfast because I've got a cold coming, so I asked Jock, and the pig bought this. I'm going to get a scrummy dress this afternoon. I'm frightfully excited about the theatre to-night. It's simply ripping. Just going to have rum and honey for my cold. Good-bye.

"Your PHYLLIS."

So they don't call you grandfather! I'm afraid I feel relieved.

HEYTHORP. [*Very angry*] Be so good as to leave my letters alone!

ADELA. Now, Father, please don't get into a rage. [*Smelling at the valentine.*] Patchouli!

HEYTHORP. How I ever had you for a daughter—why I ever put you in the position you are!

ADELA. Did my mother know about—this sort of thing?

HEYTHORP. No.

ADELA. How fortunate!

HEYTHORP. She could have stood it.

ADELA. Is that a sneer or a statement?

HEYTHORP. Your mother was as hard as wood—just like you.

ADELA. Really, Father, they tell me you have the manners of the old school—where do you keep them?

HEYTHORP. Well, you put my back up.

ADELA. I'm sorry. Are you going to Bath, as Dr. Somers wants?

HEYTHORP. No.

ADELA. Are you going, at least, to stop drinking port?

HEYTHORP. No! *Carpe diem*—live while I can.

ADELA. You know that any day you might have apoplexy!

HEYTHORP. Sooner have done with it than turn teetotaller!

ADELA. There's only one word for it—pagan. If you can't think of this life, you might of the next.

HEYTHORP. When they're roasting me, you'll be able to say
"I told you so." [*He rings the bell.*]

ADELA. Profanity, as usual!

HEYTHORP. Let me alone, then.

ADELA. As if I could.

[*As she goes out, MELLER, the valet, a discreet, clean-shaven man, comes in.*]

MELLER. Would you like a hand up, sir?

HEYTHORP. No! Tell cook I shall want a good dinner to-night.

MELLER. I will, sir.

HEYTHORP. And get up a bottle of the '68 port.

MELLER. [*Dubiously*] Yes, sir.

HEYTHORP. Send me Molly.

MELLER. Just come, sir, by hand.

[*Hands him a note, and goes out.*]

[*OLD HEYTHORP, after scrutinizing the note, as one does those which suggest the unpleasant, is about to open it, when the housemaid MOLLY comes in—a grey-eyed, dark-haired Irish damsel, who stands, pretty to look at, with her hands folded, her head a little to one side, her lips a little parted.*]

MOLLY. Yes, sirr?

HEYTHORP. Want to look at you.

MOLLY. Oh! I'm not tidy, sirr.

[*Puts her hands to her hair.*]

HEYTHORP. Like pretty faces. Can't bear sour ones. Had a valentine?

MOLLY. No, sirr. Who would send me one, then?

HEYTHORP. Not got a young man?

MOLLY. Well, I might. But he's over in my country.

HEYTHORP. [*Holding out the valentine*] What do you think of this?

MOLLY. [*Scrutinizing the card reverently*] Indeed, an' ut's pretty, too.

HEYTHORP. Like to keep it?

MOLLY. Oh! if 'tis not takin' ut from you, sirr.

HEYTHORP. [*Fumbling out a coin*] Little present for you.

MOLLY. [*Gasping*] Oh! sirr, a sovereign—ut's too much; 'tis kingly.

HEYTHORP. Going to ask you to do something as a human being.

MOLLY. Shure an' I will do annything you like.

HEYTHORP. Then put your nose in here every now and then—can't get up without a hand—don't like ringing—can't bear feeling dependent. Understand me?

MOLLY. Och! an' I *do*. And you so active in your brain,

and such a grand gentleman. 'Tis an honour, ut is. I'll be puttin' me nose in all the time, I will.

HEYTHORP. [*With a little courtly bow*] Much obliged to you.

MOLLY. Would you be afther wantin' annything now, sirr? Could I be pullin' you on your feet, or anny thrifle?

HEYTHORP. No, thank you. You're a good girl.

MOLLY. 'Tis proud ye make me, sirr.

HEYTHORP. Tell me. Have I got bad manners?

MOLLY. Oh! sirr, no. 'Tis lovely manners ye have—the rale old manners.

HEYTHORP. When I was young I was fond of an Irish girl.

MOLLY. An' wouldn't that be the pleasure of her!

HEYTHORP. Blarney! No. I didn't know my luck.

MOLLY. Ah! the luck—'tis a chancey thing.

HEYTHORP. Yes. If you ever get any—stick to it.

MOLLY. I will that. Could I be bringin' you your tay, or a bottle, or annything?

HEYTHORP. No, thank you. [*She goes out.*]

HEYTHORP. [*He fumbles the letter open and reads it; drops his hand, and sits staring before him*] Ruffian!

MELLER. [*Entering*] Mr. Farney, sir. [*He goes out again.*]

FARNEY. Good afternoon, sir. Great change in the weather; quite spring-like. I've brought you the purchase deed to sign for the Company. Pillins' have signed already.

[*He places a document before OLD HEYTHORP, and a stylographic pen.*]

HEYTHORP. [*After signing*] Best thing the Company ever did, Mr Farney. Four sound ships for sixty thousand pounds. Conscience clear on that.

FARNEY. [*With enthusiasm*] I should think so, sir. A great stroke of business, I feel.

HEYTHORP. Heard from a shareholder called Ventnor?

FARNEY. No, sir.

HEYTHORP. Well, I have. You may get a letter that'll make you open your eyes. Just write for me, will you?

"CHARLES VENTNOR, ESQ.,

"Feb. 14.

"12, Fawcitt Street, Liverpool.

"SIR,—I have your letter of even date, the contents of which I fail to understand. My solicitors will be informed of it.

"Yours truly——" [*He signs.*]

FARNEY. [*All eyes*] Can I do anything for you, sir?

HEYTHORP. Get straight back to the office and drop that on him as you go—impudent ruffian!

FARNEY. Might I ask what he——?

HEYTHORP. [*Shaking his head*] My letter'll bring him round here, if I'm not mistaken.

FARNEY. I take this opportunity of saying, sir, how much I've admired the way you got this purchase through, in spite of all the opposition. In fact, sir, in the office we all swear by you.

HEYTHORP. [*With his little bow*] Thank you, Mr. Farney—pleasure to hear that.

FARNEY. The way you rallied your voice for that last speech. Such pluck, sir. I don't know if you ever heard your nickname in Liverpool "Old English"? Personally I think it's a proud one.

HEYTHORP. "Æquamemento," Mr. Farney, "rebus in arduis servare mentem." Pronounce Horace like foreigners now, don't they?

FARNEY. I believe they do, sir. Of course I don't especially object to foreigners.

HEYTHORP. Don't know what they were made for—except to give trouble.

FARNEY. There isn't very much of old England left, as you remember it, I suppose, sir.

HEYTHORP. The breed goes on; it's in the bone.

FARNEY. Yes, sir, but there isn't much meat on it, nowadays.

[*He looks at a picture.*]

HEYTHORP. Bought that after the Crimea—hung in my chambers in the Albany, before I married. Never marry, Mr. Farney—lose your independence.

FARNEY. [*With a smile*] Afraid I've lost it, sir. Can't say I ever had much.

HEYTHORP. Only thing in life. Heel on your neck—no matter whose—better dead.

FARNEY. You must have had a good life, sir.

HEYTHORP. Lasted out all my cronies, every man Jack of 'em—can't call Joe Pillin alive. Careful fellows, too—some. Live a bit longer, I hope. Good-day to you. Give that chap my letter.

FARNEY. Good-day, sir. I hope you'll live for many years. The ship wouldn't be the same without you.

[*OLD HEYTHORP cuts him off with a nod and movement of his hand, and he goes out. OLD HEYTHORP takes up the little pink note, muttering.*

HEYTHORP. Fond of me—worth the risk.

[*MELLER enters with a bunch of hyacinths.*

MELLER. A young lady's brought these, sir. A Miss Larne.

HEYTHORP. Where?

MELLER. In the hall.

HEYTHORP. Tell her to come in.

MELLER. Shall I put them in water, sir? Very partial to water—the 'yacinth.

HEYTHORP. Smell 'em first—the dam teetotallers.

[*He takes a long sniff.*

[*Then MELLER takes them out, and PHYLLIS comes in.*

PHYLLIS. I've bought my dress, Guardy! It's a oner. I won't kiss you because of my cold. We're going to the *Mikado*. Fancy! I've never seen it. Do you like hyacinths?

HEYTHORP. Favourite scent.

PHYLLIS. Oh! what luck! Somehow I thought you would. This is a jolly room. It's got all your lar-es and penat-es, I suppose?

HEYTHORP. Lārēs et penātēs.

PHYLLIS. Oh! I just read it, you know—in a novel. D'you like novels, Guardy?

HEYTHORP. Never read 'em.

PHYLLIS. Ah! but you've had real adventures of your own. Adventures must be lovely.

HEYTHORP. Not for young ladies.

PHYLLIS. I don't care a bit for mother's stories. There's always a baronet. And they're pretty steep.

HEYTHORP. Steep?

PHYLLIS. Hideously good and strong. You know, Guardy, you can't love anyone who isn't a little bad. *You* never were too good, I'm sure.

HEYTHORP. Human being.

PHYLLIS. That means you had some jolly go's.

HEYTHORP. Come here!

PHYLLIS. My cold, Guardy!

HEYTHORP. Don't catch colds—my age—haven't time. Enjoy yourself, but remember—world's hard; lots of ruffians always on the look-out.

PHYLLIS. I know. There's a man comes to see mother. He makes me squirm. We had rather larks with him, though, yesterday after you'd gone.

HEYTHORP. Oh?

PHYLLIS. Yes, we heard him being insulting to mother, and that young man—Guardy, he's got more sand than you think. You should have heard him say "Out you go! One, two——" and out he did go. I wish he hadn't, then Bob could have knocked him down.

HEYTHORP. Bob!

PHYLLIS. Well, that's his name. He really had quite a nice glare in his eye.

HEYTHORP. Who is this visitor fellow?

PHYLLIS. He's mother's lawyer; Ventnor he's called.

HEYTHORP. The devil he is!

PHYLLIS. Oh yes. You know him, don't you?

HEYTHORP. I do. So he came to see her yesterday! What about?

PHYLLIS. Oh! money. Guardy, I've been thinking about what you told me. It would be lovely to have money of my

own. I think it's perfectly splendid of you, because I know you're not well off.

HEYTHORP. Poor as a church mouse.

PHYLLIS. [*Clasping her hands*] I adore your expressions—they're real old English. Being with you is like being in a boat—it's so breezy. And you've got such a ripping name—Sylvanus. It means made of wood, doesn't it?

HEYTHORP. Not quite. Name in my family old as the hills. When I go, it goes.

PHYLLIS. [*Clouding*] Don't, Guardy!

HEYTHORP. Can't stop Anno Domini. Never mind! Stick him up all we can. Give me a kiss.

PHYLLIS. On the top of your head only. My cold's coming back. Rum and honey only last three hours. I'm going to sneak Jock's go when I get in. Do you call that low down? He's only trying to have a cold.

HEYTHORP. Young rascal!

PHYLLIS. Do you ever have remorse, Guardy?

HEYTHORP. No.

PHYLLIS. Jock had it once—I never heard such a noise. [*She gurgles.*] You see, he had a pet rabbit, and one day we had it for dinner without knowing.

HEYTHORP. Ate his pet rabbit?

PHYLLIS. His remorse didn't come from *that* exactly. You see, after we'd eaten it, we found out it wasn't his.

HEYTHORP. Stole it?

PHYLLIS. Not altogether; you see it came into the garden after a bit of lettuce he happened to be holding out, so, of course, he kept it. The owner only came round after we'd eaten it, and Jock got a frightful hiding; it was then he had his remorse. I do hope the pig'll behave to-night. We shall have awful larks, Guardy.

HEYTHORP. Remember! Bread and butter with independence better than champagne with a fool.

PHYLLIS. Yes. Only somehow I don't think Bob is a fool; I think he's just been too well brought up. Were you ever in

love, Guardy—I mean, really and truly? [HEYTHORP *nods.*]
Did you marry her? [HEYTHORP *shakes his head.*] Why not?

HEYTHORP. [*Grimly*] Ask no questions—be told no lies.

PHYLLIS. No. Only—only—you know I *have* got a sort of feeling——

HEYTHORP. Out with it!

PHYLLIS. That—that you're our grandfather.

HEYTHORP. [*After a long stare*] Quite right! Sorry?

PHYLLIS. *Rather not!* I think it's awfully jolly. Did she die? [OLD HEYTHORP *nods.*] Poor Guardy! [*Cuddling.*] Well, it's all the same now, isn't it? Here we are! I suppose your daughter doesn't know?

HEYTHORP. Told her yesterday. Been praying for me ever since.

PHYLLIS. M'm! I don't believe in praying for other people. I think it's check. Besides, things that are done are done, aren't they?

HEYTHORP. [*Nodding*] Never look back—doesn't do.

PHYLLIS. [*Switching off*] I do so wonder what you'll think of me in that dress. [*Suddenly.*] I know! [*To herself.*] Nobby!

[MELLER *enters with the hyacinths.*]

MELLER. Mr. Joseph Pillin, sir.

PHYLLIS. [*Awed*] Oh! Is that Bob's father?

HEYTHORP. Yes. Run along.

[PHYLLIS *gives him a hasty kiss, and goes towards the door, looking curiously at JOE PILLIN, who enters behind his top hat, very pale and grave.*]

HEYTHORP. Well, Joe, what a death's-head you look! Sorry you sold your ships?

JOE PILLIN. [*After making sure of the door*] Who was that?

HEYTHORP. My granddaughter.

JOE PILLIN. What! One of those that I've—— Does she come here? She's very pretty.

HEYTHORP. Yes. And your son's sweet on her.

JOE PILLIN. Oh, dear! He picks up with everyone. Sylvanus, I've had a man called Ventnor to see me.

HEYTHORP. H'm! What do you make of this?

[*He holds out VENTNOR's letter.*

JOE PILLIN. [*Reading*] "Certain facts having come to my knowledge, I—" what's that word?—"deem it my duty to call a special meeting of 'The Island Navigation Company' to consider circumstances in connection with the purchase of Mr. Joseph Pillin's fleet. And I give you notice that at this meeting your conduct will be called in question.—Charles Ventnor." Ah! There it is! Why did you get me to make that settlement, Sylvanus?

HEYTHORP. Natural affection, Joe.

JOE PILLIN. But that's no excuse for cheating your Company.

HEYTHORP. Didn't—cheated you; they'd agreed to the £60,000 before I saw you.

JOE PILLIN. Well, really, Sylvanus—really—an old friend! But the fact remains. It's a commission—a breach of trust. This man asked me if I knew that Mrs. Larne. What could I say? I d-don't know her. But why did he ask?

HEYTHORP. Her lawyer—smells the rat.

JOE PILLIN. Oh, dear! oh, dear! This'll be the death of me.
[*He sits down, quite crumpled up.*

HEYTHORP. Pull yourself together, Joe. Can't touch you; can't upset the purchase, or the settlement. Worst comes to the worst, upset me, that's all.

JOE PILLIN. How you can sit there and look the same as ever! Are you sure they can't touch me?

HEYTHORP. Not they! Keep your pecker up and your mouth shut, and get off abroad.

JOE PILLIN. Yes, yes, I must. I'm very bad. But I don't know, I'm sure, with this hanging over me. What are you thinking of, Sylvanus. You look very funny.

HEYTHORP. [*Coming out of a sort of coma*] Thinking I'll diddle him yet.

JOE PILLIN. How are you going to do it?

HEYTHORP. Bluff the beggar out of it.

JOE PILLIN. But suppose you can't?

HEYTHORP. Buy him off; he's one of my creditors.

JOE PILLIN. You always had such nerve. Do you ever wake up between two and four, and see everything black?

HEYTHORP. Not I! Put a good stiff nightcap on, my boy.

JOE PILLIN. Yes, I sometimes wish I was less temperate. But I couldn't stand it. I'm told your doctor forbids you alcohol.

HEYTHORP. He does.

JOE PILLIN. And yet you drink it. Sylvanus, do you think—if my son is sweet on this young lady, we could—we could give that as a reason for the settlement.

HEYTHORP. [*After a moment's thought, stoutly*] No! Won't have it. She's too good for him.

JOE PILLIN. Really, Sylvanus! I'm sure I don't want my son to marry her. I only thought it would make it more natural. We could say they were engaged, and break it off later. It would prevent——

HEYTHORP. No! Won't have her dragged in. Pay my own scot.

JOE PILLIN. But if they hold this meeting and my name gets into the papers——

HEYTHORP. Won't! Leave it to me!

JOE PILLIN. He must be stopped, Sylvanus, he really must. And you—you advise me to get off to-morrow? [OLD HEYTHORP *nods*.] Well, good-bye. I can't forgive you—it was too bad, you know, too bad, altogether. All the same, I wish I had your nerve.

HEYTHORP. Poor shaky chap, you are! All to pieces at the first shot. Buck up, Joe!

[*He holds out his hand and JOE PILLIN puts his quavering hand into it.*]

JOE PILLIN. You won't let them, Sylvanus? You can't afford it. It would make a terrible scandal. And without the fees from your Boards, you'd be a pauper. You'll find a way; you owe it to me, you know. Well, good-bye! I don't suppose I shall be back till the summer, if I ever come back.

[*He quavers out of the room.*]

HEYTHORP. [*To himself*] Pauper. Dependent on that holy woman—byword and a beggar—not if I know it!

[MELLER comes in, draws the curtains, then turns up a lamp on the little table beside OLD HEYTHORP.]

MELLER. Cup of tea, sir? [OLD HEYTHORP shakes his head.]

HEYTHORP. Have my nap.

MELLER. Excuse me, sir, can I go out this evening, after dinner? Miss Heythorp's going to a ball, sir.

HEYTHORP. Ball!

MELLER. Charity ball, sir, I believe.

HEYTHORP. Ah! it would be!

MELLER. The Mersey Temperance League, I fancy, sir.

HEYTHORP. Good God!

MELLER. Yes, sir. Anything else, sir.

HEYTHORP. Nothing, thank you.

[MELLER, going to the door, pauses a moment to look at the old man, who, with a rumbling sigh, has taken out a silk handkerchief to put over his head. A bell sounds.]

MELLER. That was the front door, sir. Do you wish to see anybody?

HEYTHORP. Man called Ventnor—no one else.

MELLER. No, sir. [*He goes out.*]

[OLD HEYTHORP, on whom the light from the reading lamp falls brightly, sits back, listening, his eyes very much alive.]

MELLER. [*Re-entering, Left forward*] Mr. Ventnor, sir.

[VENTNOR comes in, the door is closed, and he stands as if trying to adjust himself, in the dark room, to the pool of light and the richly-coloured old figure in it.]

HEYTHORP. Sorry, can't get up—sit down.

[VENTNOR draws a chair forward and sits within the radius of the light on the opposite side of the little table where the lamp stands.]

VENTNOR. I got your answer, Mr. Heythorp. [OLD HEYTHORP nods.] I think it best to give you a chance to explain your conduct before going further.

HEYTHORP. Your letter's Greek to me.

VENTNOR. I can soon make it into plain English.

HEYTHORP. Sooner the better.

VENTNOR. Well, Mr. Heythorp, the long and the short of the matter is this: Our friend Mr. Pillin paid you a commission of ten per cent. on the sale of his ships. [OLD HEYTHORP *makes a movement.*] Oh! excuse me! The money was settled on Mrs. Larne and her children—your grandchildren, you know.

HEYTHORP. Where did you get hold of that cock-and-bull story?

VENTNOR. It won't do, Mr. Heythorp! My witnesses are Mrs. Larne, Mr. Pillin himself, and Mr. Scriven. After I left you yesterday, you paid a visit to Mrs. Larne and told her of this settlement; told her to keep it dark, too. I happen to be her lawyer, and she telephoned to me. [OLD HEYTHORP *makes a movement.*] Yes—that gets you. The good lady is hard pressed, and she wanted to raise money on it. For that purpose she gave me a note to Scriven. Oh! you did it very neatly; but you're dealing with a man of the world, Mr. Heythorp.

HEYTHORP. [*Inaudibly*] With a blackguard.

VENTNOR. Beg pardon? I didn't get you. [*His voice hardens.*] I had to drag it out of Scriven, but I find, as I surmised, that Mr. Pillin is the settlor. Here's the joke, Mr. Heythorp; Mrs. Larne doesn't know Mr. Pillin, and Mr. Pillin doesn't know Mrs. Larne. I have it from their own mouths. Amusing, isn't it? £6000 is the sum in settlement—ten per cent. on £60,000—a child could put that two and two together.

HEYTHORP. Nothing to me what Joe Pillin does with his money.

VENTNOR. Can you point to any other reason why Mr. Pillin should make this very clandestine sort of settlement on a woman he doesn't know?

HEYTHORP. [*After a pause*] Could—but won't.

VENTNOR. Easily said. You see, Mr. Heythorp, *you* told Mrs. Larne of this settlement.

HEYTHORP. Think you can tell that rigmarole to a meeting?

VENTNOR. I not only can, but, if necessary, I will.

HEYTHORP. You'll get the lie direct—no proof.

VENTNOR. Pardon me, I have the note from Mrs. Larne to her lawyer.

HEYTHORP. Nothing to connect her with me.

VENTNOR. Oh! I've not had dealings with Mrs. Larne without careful inquiry. It's well known in Dublin that her late husband was your natural son. I've got written testimony to that.

HEYTHORP. Bring an action against you—make you pay through the nose.

VENTNOR. Bluff—it won't do, Mr. Heythorp, and you know it. I've got you; the merest whiff of dicky-dealing like this will blow you out of your directorships. You've outstayed your welcome as it is. I told you as much yesterday.

HEYTHORP. Yes, you were good enough to sneer at my infirmities.

VENTNOR. [*Angrily*] I spoke the truth. And this business will finish you off.

HEYTHORP. If you're going to call this meeting, what have you come here for—blackmail?

VENTNOR. [*With growing choler*] Oh! you take that tone, do you? Still think you can ride roughshod? Well, you're very much mistaken. I advise you to keep a civil tongue and consider your position.

HEYTHORP. What d'you want?

VENTNOR. I'm not sure this isn't a case for a prosecution.

HEYTHORP. Gammon!

VENTNOR. Neither gammon nor spinach. Now look here! You owe me three hundred pounds; you've owed it me for thirteen years. Either you pay me what you owe me at once, or I call this meeting and make what I know public. You'll very soon find out where you are, and a good thing too, for a more unscrupulous—unscrupulous——

HEYTHORP. [*Very red and swollen, and as if trying to rise*] So—you—you bully me?

VENTNOR. [*Rising*] You'll do no good for yourself by getting

into a passion. At your age, and in your condition, I recommend a little prudence. Now just take my terms quietly, or you know what'll happen. I'm not to be intimidated by any of your brass. You've said you won't pay me, and I've said you shall. I'm out to show you who's master.

HEYTHORP. You cowardly, pettifogging attorney, do your damndest!

VENTNOR. [*Seeing red*] Oho! Bluster it out, do you? You miserable old turkey-cock! You apoplectic old image! I'll have you off your Boards—I'll have you in the gutter. You think in your dotage you can still domineer? Two can play at that game. By George! One foot in bankruptcy, and one foot in the grave—Ha!

[OLD HEYTHORP *has reached forward for the bell. VENTNOR removes it from his reach, and the old man sinks back. Somewhat relaxed by this assertion of his dominance, VENTNOR stands looking at the old man, who is lying back breathing hard.*

VENTNOR. Ah! that's shown you. Well, it's never too late to learn. For once you've come up against someone a leetle bit too much for you. Haven't you now? Better cry "Peccavi" and have done with it. [*Putting down the bell on the far edge of the table, he looks again at the old man, then takes a turn up and down, and again stops and looks at him.*] You shouldn't have called me names. You're an old man, and I don't want to be too hard on you. I'm only showing you that you can't play God Almighty any longer. You've had your own way for too many years. And now you can't have it, see—that's all. [OLD HEYTHORP *moves forward in his chair again.*] Now, don't get into a passion again, calm yourself. [*The old man is very still.*] That's better. I see you'll come round. For, mind you, this is your last chance. I'm a man of my word; and what I say, I do. Now then, are you going to pay me, and look pleasant?

[OLD HEYTHORP, *by a violent and unsuspected effort, jerks himself forward and reaches the bell. As it rings VENTNOR makes a grab at it too late.*

VENTNOR. [*Angrily*] You're going to ruin, then?

[*MELLER has appeared.*]

HEYTHORP. Show this hound out!

VENTNOR. [*Glenching his fists; then as MELLER moves towards him*] That's it, is it? Very well, Mr. Heythorp! Ah! Very well! [*Carefully shepherded by MELLER, he goes out.*]

[*OLD HEYTHORP sits slightly rocking his body from side to side; he puts his hand to his throat as if it had been worried. MELLER comes back.*]

MELLER. [*Close*] Hope he hasn't hurt you, sir?

HEYTHORP. No! Open the window—get the smell of the fellow out. Lost my temper—mistake. Pull me up! [*MELLER, who has drawn back the curtains and opened the window, disclosing the shapes of dark trees and the grape-bloom sky of a mild, moist night, now pulls him up.*] That's better. [*He takes a long breath.*] Get me a hot bath before dinner, and put some pine stuff into it. Evening clothes.

MELLER. Really, sir?

HEYTHORP. Why not?

MELLER. No, indeed, sir.

HEYTHORP. Get up a bottle of the Perrier Jouet. What's the menu?

MELLER. Germane soup, sir; filly de sole; sweetbread; cutlet soubrees; rum souffly.

HEYTHORP. H'm! Tell her to get me an oyster, and put on a savoury.

MELLER. Yes, sir. Excuse me, sir, but did that—er—fellow—threaten you?

HEYTHORP. Bullied me.

MELLER. Could I do anything about it? I'm pretty handy with the gloves. [*He puts up his fists.*]

HEYTHORP. No. Trifle. Give me an appetite.

MELLER. Yes, sir. Then what time shall I turn the bath in?

[*OLD HEYTHORP returns to his chair and lowers himself into it.*]

HEYTHORP. Seven o'clock. Have my nap now.

MELLER. Yes, sir. [*He closes the window and draws the curtains.*] Shall I turn out the light, sir?

[OLD HEYTHORP nods. MELLER turns the lamp out, leaving only firelight, then goes out.]

HEYTHORP. [*Murmuring*] Cooked my own goose! H'm!
[*He settles himself for a sleep.*]

The curtain falls for a minute.

SCENE II

The scene is the same, about three hours later. OLD HEYTHORP, in evening dress, is finishing dinner, his napkin tucked in low down on his dress shirt. He is just lifting a large empty champagne glass to a napkined champagne bottle in MELLER's hand.

HEYTHORP. Fill up.

MELLER. [*Remonstrative*] These are the special glasses, sir, only four to the bottle.

HEYTHORP. Fill up! Buzz the bottle, before the sweet.
[*MELLER fills the glass, emptying the bottle. OLD HEYTHORP drinks.*] Good wine.

MELLER. I frapped it just a little, sir.

HEYTHORP. [*Attacking the soufflé before him*] Old fur coat in the wardrobe, no use for it—take it for yourself.

MELLER. Thank you, sir.

HEYTHORP. Only get moth.

MELLER. It's got it, sir.

HEYTHORP. M'm! Afraid I've worried you a lot.

MELLER. Oh! no, sir—not more than reason.

HEYTHORP. Very sorry—can't help it—find that when you get like me.

MELLER. I've always admired your pluck, sir; keeping the flag flyin'.

HEYTHORP. [*Bowing*] Much obliged to you.

[*OLD HEYTHORP finishes the soufflé and sips brown sherry.*]

MELLER. [*Touching the bell*] Cook's done a cheese remmyquin, sir.

HEYTHORP. Give her my compliments—capital dinner.

[*The maid MOLLY comes in with the "remmyquin," and gives it to MELLER.*

HEYTHORP. Have my port with it.

MELLER. [*Serving the ramequin*] Excuse me, sir, but after a bottle of champagne—are you sure you ought?

HEYTHORP. [*Digging into the ramequin*] No, but I'm going to.

MELLER. It's very hot, sir. Shall I take it out of the case?

HEYTHORP. Touch of cayenne.

MELLER. Yes, sir. About the port—would you mind if I asked Miss Heythorp?

HEYTHORP. [*With fork arrested*] If you do you can leave my service.

MELLER. Well, sir, I don't accept the responsibility.

HEYTHORP. Who asked you to? Not a baby.

MELLER. No, sir.

HEYTHORP. Well, get it then!

[*MELLER, after a look, shrugs his shoulders and goes to the improvised sideboard for the port. He pours it out gingerly, while OLD HEYTHORP finishes the savoury.*

HEYTHORP. Fill! [*He drinks the glass savorously.*] Help me up. [*He is helped up and into his chair.*] Put the decanter there.

[*MOLLY enters with a tray, on which are coffee and cigars.*

MELLER. [*Taking it from her—softly*] Gov'nor's goin' for the gloves to-night. Sherry—champagne—port. Simply can't hold him in.

MOLLY. [*As softly*] Poor old gentleman, let um have his pleasure. Shure he's only got his dinner.

[*He prepares the coffee, and she goes out.*

MELLER. Shall I cut your cigar, sir?

HEYTHORP. Um! What's that squealing?

MELLER. [*Listening*] I think it's Miss Heythorp singing, sir.

HEYTHORP. Cat. [*Finishing his third glass of port.*] Ever hear Jenny Lind—eh—Swedish nightingale?

MELLER. Beg your pardon, sir.

HEYTHORP. No, weren't born. Mario—Grisi—old Lablache—great days of opera, those.

MELLER. I'm sure, sir.

HEYTHORP. Theatre too—old Kemble, Power, Little Robson—once saw Edmund Kean.

MELLER. Indeed, sir! Would that be a relation of the present Edmund Kean?

HEYTHORP. Who's he?

MELLER. On the Halls, sir, the great ventrilôquist.

HEYTHORP. No actors now. Saw Hermit win his Derby.

MELLER. [*Interested*] Did you, indeed, sir? Was he the equal of Pretty Polly, do you think?

HEYTHORP. Don't know the lady.

MELLER. [*With a touch of pity*] No, sir, you don't keep up with it, I suppose.

HEYTHORP. All four-in-hands then, tandems, gigs—drove my own cab—tiger behind.

MELLER. Those were little boys, weren't they, sir?

HEYTHORP. Little rascals in boots—blue liveries—tight as a drum. Cremorne—Star and Garter. Wet sheet and a flowing tide. Great days.

MELLER. Your cigar, sir?

HEYTHORP. [*Drinking off his coffee and taking his cigar, which MELLER lights*] All gone! [*Following the first puff of smoke, with a feeble wave of his cigar.*] Smoke! Statesmen then—roast beef. Stout oak! Old Pam!

MELLER. Beg pardon, sir?

HEYTHORP. Get me the old brandy.

MELLER. [*Aghast*] Brandy, sir! I really daren't.

HEYTHORP. Bunkum!

MELLER. You'll forgive me, sir; but if Miss Heythorp heard——

HEYTHORP. Are you my servant, or hers?

MELLER. Yours, sir. But the doctor's orders were positive.

HEYTHORP. Damn the doctor! Get the brandy—mother's milk.

[MELLER *wavers to the sideboard, and brings the bottle.*

HEYTHORP. Large glass—want to swing it round, get the aroma.

[MELLER *fetches a goblet and puts it and the bottle on the little table by the hand-bell, removing the port decanter, glass, and coffee cup.*

HEYTHORP. Pour it out. [MELLER *pours out a little brandy.*

MELLER. You said I might go out, sir, but perhaps I'd better stay.

HEYTHORP. Why? [*With a grin.*] Where I dines I sleeps. Ever hear of Jorrock's?

MELLER. No, sir.

HEYTHORP. Good Lord!

MELLER. Yes, sir. Of course, Molly will be handy, sir, if you want anything.

[*He goes to the door, stands a moment, looking at the old man blowing rings from his cigar: throws up his hands suddenly, and goes out.*

[OLD HEYTHORP *very slowly and with a feeble hand takes up the glass and sits revolving it before his nose.*

HEYTHORP. [*To himself*] Send in my resignations to-morrow—not give that cur a chance.

[*He is drinking the brandy as the door is opened and ADELA HEYTHORP comes in. She is in a white cloak, with one hand and arm in a long white glove and the other glove dangling from it. She has reached him before he sees her.*

ADELA. Father! Meller let out you're drinking brandy after champagne and port. That's absolute poison. It'll kill you. [OLD HEYTHORP *thrusts out his tufted lower lip and reaches for the bottle.*] Oh! no. If you behave like a baby, you must be treated like one. [*She seizes the bottle and puts it back on the sideboard.*

HEYTHORP. [*With his hand to his throat, as if he felt again the sensation of the afternoon*] So—you bully me—too—to-night!

ADELA. Well, really, Father! One would think you had no self-control at all. I don't know whether I ought to go out.

[OLD HEYTHORP's passion seems to yield before a thought. His face slowly assumes a sort of grin, in which there is a dash of cunning.]

HEYTHORP. Perfectly well. Why not?

ADELA. If it weren't for Temperance I wouldn't. And I tell you, plainly: If you go on like this, I won't have liquor in the house. Good-night! [She turns and goes rustling away.]

[The old man sits listening. There is the sound of a door shut and of a carriage moving from the door.]

HEYTHORP. [To himself] Gone! Not so fast, my lady! Not under your heel till to-morrow. [He makes an effort to get up, but cannot, and sits a moment breathing hard; then, stretching out his hand, he rings the bell.] Last night to call my soul my own.

[After a moment the girl MOLLY comes in, and stands regarding him.]

MOLLY. What would you be wantin', sirr?

HEYTHORP. Good girl. Help me up.

[MOLLY takes his hands and pulls, but cannot raise him. He looks rather helplessly from side to side.]

MOLLY. Oh! Ut's me that's not strong enough. Would I get Cook?

[OLD HEYTHORP shakes his head. He puts his hands on the arms of the chair, and shifts his body towards the edge of the chair, then holds out his hands.]

HEYTHORP. Now!

[The girl pulls and this time slowly raises him. He stands very still and flushed.]

MOLLY. Sure, it's you have the big heart; it's never bate you are.

HEYTHORP. Thank you. That'll do. Want you again—ring.

MOLLY. Yes, sirr. I'll be up all the time. It's the great unhookin' there'll be when the misthress comes home from her ball.

[She goes.]

[He does not move till she has gone. Then a smile comes on his face, and he goes across to the sideboard. Throughout the scene he retains his dignity.]

HEYTHORP. [Muttering] Bully me—will she! [He reaches up and takes the brandy bottle and a sherry glass. With infinite difficulty he pours into it, and slowly, slowly drinks it down; then, grasping the bottle to his chest, he moves across back to his chair, and sinks into it, with the bottle still clasped. For a few seconds he remains like that: then seems to realize that the attitude does not become a gentleman. Now begins his last struggle. The bottle is clasped in his arms; but his hands, with which he must place it on the table, have lost all feeling. Again he struggles, and succeeds in shifting his body in the chair towards the table which nearly overlaps the arm. He rests, breathing stertorously. Inch by inch he edges the base of the bottle till it touches the table; then rests again. With a groan and a supreme effort he screws his trunk over towards the table, and the bottle stands.] Done it! [His lips relax in a smile.] What's this? Red? [His body sags back in the chair, he sits motionless, and slowly his eyes close.] To-morrow! [There is a sound of suffering, and the word "To-morrow," repeated in a whispering sigh, dies into silence.]

The stage is darkened for twenty seconds, to represent the lapse of two hours.

SCENE III

The same. The door from the hall is opened and MELLER enters. He moves two or three steps, looking at OLD HEYTHORP still recumbent in his chair. PHYLLIS has come into the doorway.

MELLER. [Turning back towards her, in a low voice] Half-past eleven, Miss. Afraid it's too late for you to see him. He's asleep.

PHYLLIS. [Low] I won't wake him, unless he happens to. But I did want to show him my dress! [She has on a cloak over a dress of white tulle, her first low-cut frock; a bunch of lilies of the valley is at her breast.]

MELLER. As a fact, Miss, it wouldn't matter if you did wake him. He's got to go to bed.

[BOB PILLIN *has moved into the doorway and stands close to PHYLLIS; MELLER passes them and goes out.*

PHYLLIS. [*Under her breath*] Bob, hold my cloak!

[BOB PILLIN *reverently removes the cloak, which catches.*
Oh! you duffy! Is it clear?

BOB PILLIN. [*Under his breath*] Not quite. It's a pin. I'm so afraid of hurting you.

PHYLLIS. Oh! Gefoozlem! Let it rip! Ouch!

BOB PILLIN. [*Cloak in hand*] My God! Did I——?

PHYLLIS. [*Mending him with a smile*] All serene! [*She steals into the lamp glow.*] Guardy! My dress, Guardy!

[*No answer. She stands twiddling the bunch of lilies; BOB PILLIN closes up.*

PHYLLIS. [*Whispering*] He is fast and deep, isn't he? [*Holding up the flowers.*] I'll put it in his buttonhole. When he wakes, won't he jump? [*She steals close, bends, and slips the flowers into the buttonhole. Then kisses the tip of her finger, and blows the kiss at him.*] Good-night, Guardy, dear; bless you! [*She skips back, twirls round, reluctant to go without being seen, and blows another kiss.*] I do wish he'd wake! He'll be sorry he didn't see my dress.

[*At the disappointed whisper BOB PILLIN walks up to the old man, and bends. Suddenly he stands up and looks back at PHYLLIS.*

PHYLLIS. Is he awake?

BOB PILLIN. [*In a queer voice*] No.

PHYLLIS. I must just try again.

BOB PILLIN. No. [*He moves as she comes near, and very decisively places his hands on her shoulders.*] No. Not fair. Come along. [*She looks up at him, intrigued by the firmness of his voice and touch.*

PHYLLIS. [*Wilfully*] I will wake him!

[*As she speaks, he just turns her round, and pushes her before him quietly and slowly off into the hall.*

PHYLLIS. [*Under her breath, mockingly, to the air before her*] Oo-oh! Aren't we strong!

[*There is a little laugh from her, outside. Then the sound of a closing door, and of a carriage driving away.*

[*MELLER comes hastening into the room and goes quickly up to the chair.*

MELLER. Sir! [*Louder.*] Sir! [*He touches the shoulder, then shakes it slightly.*] Bed-time, sir!

[*He bends down, listens; stands up abruptly and beckons to MOLLY in the doorway. The girl comes quickly.*

MELLER. [*Sharply*] That gentleman's right. He's not breathing. Feel his forehead! [*The girl, feeling it, draws her hand away sharply.*

MOLLY. Oh! Ut's cold as ice. Oh! no! Shure, an' he's niver——!

MELLER. [*With his hand on the old man's pulse, in an awed voice*] Gone!

MOLLY. Mother o' Jasus! The grand old fightin' gintleman! The great old sinner he was!

The curtain falls.

ESCAPE

CAST OF THE ORIGINAL PRODUCTION AT
THE AMBASSADORS THEATRE, LONDON,
AUGUST 12, 1926

PRODUCED BY LEON M. LION

MATT DENANT	.	.	.	.	<i>Nicholas Hannen</i>
THE GIRL OF THE TOWN	.	.	.	.	<i>Ursula Jeans</i>
THE PLAIN CLOTHES MAN	.	.	.	.	<i>Frank Freeman</i>
THE POLICEMAN	.	.	.	.	<i>Harold Lester</i>
THE OTHER POLICEMAN	.	.	.	.	<i>Cyril Hardingham</i>
THE FELLOW CONVICT	.	.	.	.	<i>Leon M. Lion</i>
THE WARDER	.	.	.	.	<i>Gerard Clifton</i>
THE OTHER WARDER	.	.	.	.	<i>Stafford Hilliard</i>
THE SHINGLED LADY	.	.	.	.	<i>Molly Kerr</i>
THE MAID	.	.	.	.	<i>Phyllis Konstam</i>
THE OLD GENTLEMAN	.	.	.	.	<i>Leon M. Lion</i>
THE CAPTAIN	.	.	.	.	<i>Gerard Clifton</i>
THE SHOPKEEPER	.	.	.	.	<i>Paul Gill</i>
HIS WIFE	.	.	.	.	<i>Ethel Manning</i>
HIS SISTER	.	.	.	.	<i>Ann Codrington</i>
THE MAN IN PLUS FOURS	.	.	.	.	<i>Stafford Hilliard</i>
HIS WIFE	.	.	.	.	<i>Phyllis Konstam</i>
THE DARTMOOR CONSTABLE	.	.	.	.	<i>Frank Freeman</i>
THE LABOURER	.	.	.	.	<i>Cyril Hardingham</i>
THE OTHER LABOURER	.	.	.	.	<i>Harold Lester</i>
THE FARMER	.	.	.	.	<i>Paul Gill</i>
THE LITTLE GIRL	.	.	.	.	<i>Betty Astell</i>
MISS GRACE	.	.	.	.	<i>Ann Codrington</i>
MISS DORA	.	.	.	.	<i>Margaret Halstan</i>
THE PARSON	.	.	.	.	<i>Austin Trevor</i>
THE BELLRINGER	.	.	.	.	<i>Stafford Hilliard</i>

PROLOGUE

Hyde Park at night. Summer. The Row with its iron railing, footwalk, seats, trees and bushes behind. A WOMAN, or GIRL (you can't tell), is sitting alone, in dim radiance from lamps unseen to Right and Left. Her painted mask is not unattractive, her attitude slack and uneasy. A PLAIN CLOTHES MAN passes Right to Left, glances at her inviting him and increases his pace. By the expression on her face as he approaches and recedes, it is easy for him to see what she is. TWO PEOPLE pass without glancing at her at all—they are talking of what "he said to me" and "I said to him." Then nobody passes, and, powdering her nose, she seems preparing to shift along, when from the Left, MATT DENANT appears strolling. He is a young man, tallish and athletic, dressed as if he has been racing in hot weather; he has a pair of race glasses and a cigar. The GIRL shifts forward on her seat as he approaches. He is going by when she looks suddenly up and says in a low voice: "Good evening!" He halts, looks at her, gives a little shrug, carries his hand to his hat, and answering, "Good evening!" is moving on when she speaks again.

GIRL. Have you a match? [*She is holding out a cigarette; he stops and hands her his cigarette lighter.*]

GIRL. [*Fingering the lighter*] Gold?

MATT. Brass.

GIRL. Have one? [*Offering her cigarette case.*]

MATT. Thanks, I'm smoking. [*He shows her his cigar; resting his foot on the seat and dangling his race glasses.*]

GIRL. Been racing?

MATT. Goodwood.

GIRL. I went to see the Jubilee this year.

MATT. And what did you back?

GIRL. Everything that didn't win. It's rotten when you don't back winners.

MATT. Don't you like the horses?

GIRL. They look pretty.

MATT. Prettiest things in the world.

GIRL. Pretty as women?

MATT. Saving your presence.

GIRL. Do you mean that?

MATT. Well, you get a woman once in a way that can arch her neck.

GIRL. You don't like women—that's clear.

MATT. Not too much.

GIRL. [*Smiling*] You speak your mind, anyway.

MATT. If you ask me, they've got such a lot of vice about 'em compared with horses.

GIRL. And who puts vice into them?

MATT. I know—you all say men, but d'you believe it?

GIRL. [*With a laugh*] Well, I don't know. Don't men put vice into horses?

MATT. [*Struck*] M'yes! [*Sitting down.*] All the same, there's nothing wilder than a wild horse—I've seen 'em out West.

GIRL. There's nothing *so* wild as a wild woman.

[*A momentary silence while they stare at each other.*]

MATT. Women haven't the excuse of horses—they've been tame since Eve gave Adam his tea.

GIRL. Um! Garden of Eden! Must have been something like Hyde Park—there was a prize cop there, anyway.

MATT. D'you come here often?

GIRL. [*Nodding*] Where else *can* one go? They're so particular now.

MATT. They do seem to keep you on the run.

GIRL. What are you—soldier?

MATT. Once upon a time.

GIRL. What now?

MATT. Thinking of being a parson.

GIRL. [*Laughs*] You've got money of your own, then?

MATT. A little.

GIRL. [*With a sigh*] If I had money of my own, d'you know what I'd do?

MATT. Get rid of it.

GIRL. Just what I wouldn't. If ever I got myself dependent on you men again, [*Very grimly*] shut my lights off.

MATT. Not like the lady under laughing gas.

GIRL. What was the matter with her?

MATT. Kept shouting, "I don't want to be a free, independent, economic agent! I want to be loved."

GIRL. She was wrong—No, *sir*! Get my head under a second time? Not much! But we can't save—don't make enough. So there you are! It's a good bit worse than it used to be, they say——

MATT. The ordinary girl more free and easy now, you mean?

GIRL. [*Grimly*] The *ordinary* girl?

MATT. Well, you don't call yourself ordinary, do you?

[*The GIRL sits quite still and doesn't answer.*]

MATT. Sorry! Didn't mean to hurt you.

GIRL. Give me the fellow that does: he doesn't hurt half so much. But you're quite right. [*Bitterly*] There isn't much excuse for us, now.

MATT. Aren't we getting a bit solemn?

GIRL. The gay girl—eh? They say you get used to anything: but I'll tell you—you never get used to playing the canary when you don't feel like it.

MATT. Ah! I always sympathized with canaries—expected to sing, and so permanently yellow.

GIRL. It was nice of you to sit down and talk.

MATT. Thanks; it's all secondary education.

[*She slides her hand along to his, with a card.*]

GIRL. Here's my address; you might come and see me now and then.

MATT. [*Twiddling the card—amused and embarrassed*]
On verra!

GIRL. What's that?

MATT. It's an expression of hope.

GIRL. [*Mouth opening*] Ow! How about now?

MATT. Thanks—afraid not—due somewhere at ten.

GIRL. Another?

MATT. No.

GIRL. You don't like me, I believe.

MATT. [*With a shrug*] Oh! Don't say that. You're original.

GIRL. Original sin.

MATT. There are worse things, I guess.

GIRL. You bet! There's modest worth. If *that* isn't worse! Not that this is a pretty life. It's just about as rotten as it can be.

MATT. How did you get into it?

GIRL. Cut it out! You all ask that, and you can take it from me you never get told. Well! I belong to the oldest profession in the world! That isn't true, either—there's an older.

MATT. Not really.

GIRL. The cop's. Mine wouldn't ever have been a profession but for them.

MATT. Good for you!

GIRL. It isn't good for me. Look in at Bow Street on Monday morning.

MATT. To see 'em shoot the sitting pheasant?—no, thanks. The Law isn't exactly sporting. Can't be, I suppose, if it's got to keep the course clear.

GIRL. They might wait till one makes oneself a nuisance.

MATT. Ever been run in?

GIRL. [*With a look, and a decision*] Um! Not yet! [*Suddenly*] What can we do? If we don't make a sign, who's to know us?

MATT. That's delightful.

GIRL. Clean streets!—that's the cry. Clean men! That'd be better!

MATT. And then where'd you be?

GIRL. [*Passionately*] Not here!

MATT. [*After staring at her*] Um! The kettle and the pot. What! Give me horses and dogs, all the time.

GIRL. I've got a cat.

MATT. Persian?

GIRL. [*Nodding*] A real beauty. [*Suddenly*] Wouldn't you like to come and see him?

[*He shakes his head, rises, takes his glasses, and holds out his hand. She is going to take it—then draws her hand back sharply, frowning and biting her lips. He gives a shrug, salutes, and moves on. She catches at his sleeve, misses it, sits a second, then rises and follows. Unseen by her, the PLAIN CLOTHES MAN has reappeared, Left. He moves swiftly and grasps her arm just as she is vanishing Right. The GIRL gives a little squeal as he draws her back towards the seat. She resists.*]

GIRL. Who are you?

PLAIN CLOTHES MAN. Plain clothes. [*And, as she still resists, he tries to calm her by a slight twist of the arm.*]

GIRL. You brute—you brute!

PLAIN CLOTHES MAN. Now then—quietly, and you won't get hurt.

GIRL. I wasn't doing anything.

PLAIN CLOTHES MAN. Oh! no, of course not.

GIRL. [*Looking after MATT*] I wasn't, I tell you; and he'll tell you so too! [*MATT has reappeared, Right.*] Won't you? You talked to me of your own accord?

MATT. I did. Who may you be?

PLAIN CLOTHES MAN. [*Showing his card*] This woman accosted you. I've observed her carefully, and not for the first time.

MATT. Well, you've made a blooming error. We had a chat, that's all.

PLAIN CLOTHES MAN. I saw her accost you. I saw her try to detain you—and I've seen her do it before now.

MATT. I don't care what you've seen before now—you can't arrest her for that. You didn't see it this time.

PLAIN CLOTHES MAN. [*Still holding the GIRL and looking at MATT steadily*] You know perfectly well the woman accosted you—and you'd better keep out of this.

MATT. Let the girl go, then. You're exceeding your duty.

PLAIN CLOTHES MAN. What do you know about my duty? It's my duty to keep the park decent, man or woman. Now then, are you going to clear off?

MATT. No, I'm going to stay on.

PLAIN CLOTHES MAN. All right then, you can follow us to the station.

MATT. Mayn't two people talk! I've made no complaint.

PLAIN CLOTHES MAN. I know this woman, I tell you. Don't interfere with me, or I shall want you too.

MATT. You can have me if you let the girl go.

PLAIN CLOTHES MAN. Now look here, I'm being very patient. But if you don't stop hindering me in the execution of my duty, I'll summon assistance and you'll *both* go to the station.

MATT. Don't lose your hair—I tell you, on my honour, this lady did not annoy me in the least. On the contrary——

PLAIN CLOTHES MAN. She was carrying on her profession here, as she's done before; my orders are to prevent that, and she's going to be charged. This is the third night I've watched her.

GIRL. I've never seen your face before.

PLAIN CLOTHES MAN. No, but I've seen yours—I've given you plenty of rope. That's enough, now——

[*He puts his whistle in his mouth.*]

MATT. It's a rotten shame! Drop that girl's arm!

[*He lays his hand on the PLAIN CLOTHES MAN's arm. The PLAIN CLOTHES MAN blows his whistle, drops the GIRL's arm and seizes MATT.*]

MATT. [*Breaking from him; to the GIRL*] Run for it!

GIRL. Oh! no—don't fight! The police have got it on you all the time. I'll go with him.

MATT. [*With fists up, keeping the PLAIN CLOTHES MAN at*

arm's-length] Run, I tell you. He'll have his work cut out with me.

[*But the PLAIN CLOTHES MAN is spryer than he thinks, runs in and catches him round the body.*

GIRL. Oh! Oh!

MATT. No, you don't!

[*In the violent struggle the PLAIN CLOTHES MAN's bowler hat falls off. MATT emerges at arm's-length again, squaring up.*

MATT. Come on, then, if you will have it!

[*The PLAIN CLOTHES MAN rushes in. He gets MATT's right straight from the shoulder on the point of the jaw, topples back, and goes down like a log.*

GIRL. Oh! Oh!

MATT. Run, you little idiot; run!

GIRL. [*Aghast*] Oh! he hit his head—on the rail! I heard the crack. See, he don't move!

MATT. Well, of course. I knocked him out. [*He goes a step nearer, looking down.*] The rail—did he——?

GIRL. [*Kneeling and feeling the PLAIN CLOTHES MAN's head*] Feel!

MATT. My God! That was a wump. I say!

GIRL. I told you not to fight. What did you want to fight for?

MATT. [*Pulling open the PLAIN CLOTHES MAN's coat, and diving for his heart*] I can't feel it. Curse! Now we can't leave him. [*Feeling for the heart.*] Good God!

GIRL. [*Bending and snatching at his arm*] Quick! Before anybody comes. Across the grass back there. Who'd know?

MATT. [*Listening*] I can't leave the poor devil like this. [*Looking round.*] Take his hat; go and get some water in it from the Serpentine.

[*The GIRL picks up the hat and stands undecided.*

GIRL. [*Agonized*] No, no! Come away! It's awful, this! Suppose—suppose he's dead! [*She pulls at him.*

MATT. [*Shaking her off*] Don't be a little fool! Go and get some water. Go on!

[The GIRL wrings her hands, then turns and runs off Left, with the hat. MATT continues to kneel, rubbing the PLAIN CLOTHES MAN's temples, feeling his pulse, listening at his heart.

MATT. I don't see how it's possible! [With a gesture of despair he resumes his efforts to revive the body. Suddenly he looks up.

[Two POLICEMAN have come from the Right.

POLICEMAN. What's this?

MATT. I don't know. I'm a little afraid he——

POLICEMAN. What! Who is he? [Looking at the face.] Phew! One of ours! [Bending, kneeling, putting the back of his hand to the mouth.] Not a breath! How did this happen?

MATT. [Pointing to the rail] He knocked his head on that.

POLICEMAN. Where's his hat?

MATT. It fell off. Someone's gone to get water in it.

POLICEMAN. Who?

MATT. A girl——

POLICEMAN. He blew his whistle. Did you hit him?

MATT. There was a row. He seized me. I smote him on the jaw. He fell back and hit his head on the rail.

POLICEMAN. What was the row about?

MATT. [Putting his hands to his head] Oh! God knows! Original sin.

POLICEMAN. [To the other POLICEMAN] Mate, stay with him. I'll get an ambulance. [To MATT] And you—come with me!

The curtain falls.

PART I

EPISODE I

More than a year has passed. On the prison farm, Dartmoor, in a heavy fog. The stone wall of the field runs along the back (on the back-cloth) and a stone wall joins it on the Left. MATT DENANT and a FELLOW CONVICT are picking up the potatoes they have dug up earlier. They are but dimly seen in the fog, flinging the potatoes right and left into two baskets between them. They are speaking in low voices.

MATT. The poor blighter was dead, and I got five years for manslaughter.

FELLOW CONVICT. Cripes! A cop! You were lucky not to swing, mate.

MATT. The girl stood by me like a brick. If she hadn't come forward——

FELLOW CONVICT. Lucky there, too. Most of 'em wouldn't. They're too mortal scared. 'Ow much you got left to do?

MATT. Three years, if I behave like a plaster saint.

[He stops and straightens himself.]

FELLOW CONVICT. I got four. I say, you're a torf, yn't you?

MATT. Toff! *[With a laugh.]* Item, one Oxford accent; item, one objection to being spoken to like a dog.

FELLOW CONVICT. Hush! *[Jerking his thumb towards the wall, Right.]* Fog don't prevent 'em hearin', blight 'em!

MATT. It's come up mighty sudden. Think it's going to last?

FELLOW CONVICT. After a wet spell—this time o' year, when the wind's gone—yus. They'll be roundin' us up in a minute, you'll see—and 'ome to Blighty. Makes 'em nervous—fog. That's when you get the escapes.

MATT. No one's ever got away from here, they say.

FELLOW CONVICT. There've been a good few tries, though.

MATT. Gosh! I'd like to have one.

FELLOW CONVICT. Don't you do it, mate. You want clothes, you want money, you want a car, to give you a dawg's chance. And then they'd get you. This moor's the 'ell of a place. I say, you must 'ave hit that cop a fair knock!

MATT. Just an ordinary knock-out on the jaw. It wasn't that. He landed the back of his head on the Row rail. [*He resumes potato picking.*] Poor devil! He wasn't married, luckily.

FELLOW CONVICT. Luckily? Well, you never know about *that*. But get 'im off your chest, mate—'e wouldn't sit on mine—no more than an 'Un did in the War. That's a good fair potato.
[*Holding one up.*]

[*The figure of a WARDER is dimly seen coming along from the Right under the wall. He stops.*]

WARDER. No talking there! When you've finished that row, pick back the next and then stand by to fall in. [*No answer from the CONVICTS.*] Hear me? Answer, can't you?

FELLOW CONVICT. Right, sir! [*The WARDER's figure is seen moving back.*] Nice man, ain't he? Wot'd I tell you? Early 'ome to tea.

MATT. [*Very low*] Like a dog! Three more years—like a dog!

FELLOW CONVICT. 'E's all right, reely. It's the fog. Fog makes 'em nervous; an' when a man's nervous I've always noticed 'e speaks like that.

MATT. Yes; well, *I* can't get used to it.

FELLOW CONVICT. Too particular, you torfs—get too much corn when you're two-year-olds.

MATT. [*Sharp and low*] You know the moor—where's Two Bridges?

FELLOW CONVICT. There—a mile.

MATT. And Tavistock?

FELLOW CONVICT. [*Pointing right back*] Seven. Guv'nor—don't do it. There ain't a chance in a million. You'll only

get pneumonium in this stinkin' wet, and they'll have you into the bargain, sure as eggs—bread and water, cells, and the rest of it.

MATT. I got out of Germany.

FELLOW CONVICT. Out of Germany! Cripes! That was none so dusty!

MATT. They've got no dogs here now, have they?

FELLOW CONVICT. Don't fancy they 'ave. But, Guv'nor, the whole countryside round 'ere's agynst you. They don't like convicts. Funny, yn't it?

[They have reached the end of the row, Left, and stop, stooping, with their heads close together.]

MATT. Draw me a plan with this stick.

FELLOW CONVICT. Blimy! *[Marking the earth.]* 'Ere's the main road, and 'ere's the cross road to Tavistock. 'Ere's the Inn at Two Bridges, and 'ere's Post Bridge. 'Ere's Bee Tor Cross, ten to twelve mile. Chagford up there, Moreton 'Ampstead 'ere.

MATT. What's across the main road from Two Bridges?

FELLOW CONVICT. Moor. A long bit o' wood about 'ere; then 'Ambledon; then you drops into fields to Widecombe; then up, and more moor to Heytor and Bovey. *[Pronounce BUVVY.]* There's rail at Bovey or Lustleigh, or Moreton or Tavistock, and much good that'll do you with everybody as eager to sec you as if you was the Prince of Wyles! Out this way you got Fox Tor Mire—ruddy bad bog, that!

[A moment's silence while MATT studies the chart in the soil.]

WARDER'S VOICE. *[Off]* Hurry up with that last row—you two men!

[The fog grows thicker.]

MATT. *[Smearing out the chart with his foot]* It's real thick now. Gosh! I'll have a shot!

[They move back, Right, beginning the last row.]

FELLOW CONVICT. *[Jerking his thumb Left]* There's another blighter thirty yards out on the wall there. 'E'll shoot.

MATT. I know. I'm going over that wall in the corner, and then along under his nose on the near side. Ten to one he'll

be looking out on the off side in this fog. If that chap there [*Jerking his head, Right*] doesn't spot me I'll get by.

FELLOW CONVICT. You're mad, Guv'nor. They'll shoot at sight. And if they don't see you—in ten minutes I'll have finished this row, an' they're bound to know you're gone. You 'aven't the chance of a cock-louse.

MATT. All right, friend, don't worry! A bullet'd be a nice change for me. If I don't get one—I'll give 'em a run for their money.

FELLOW CONVICT. Well, if you must go, mate—Strike the main road and run that way. [*Pointing.*] In this fog they'll 'ave to take us back before they dare start after you. You'll find a scrap of a wood a bit beyond the river on the left side. Get into it and cover yourself with leaves till it's dead dark. Then you'll still be close to the road and you can myke shift in a stack or something till the morning. If you go wandering about the moor all night in this fog, you won't get nowhere, and you'll be done in stiff before dawn.

MATT. Thanks. Sooner the better, now—Never stop to look at a fence. Next time the steam's full on. [*Puts some potatoes in his jacket.*] *Pommes crus—sauce Dartmoor.* Can one eat these raw? I ate turnips in Germany.

FELLOW CONVICT. Never tried, Guv'nor. Tyke this.
[*He holds out a slice of bread.*]

MATT. Thanks awfully. You're a good chap.

FELLOW CONVICT. Wish you luck. Wish I was comin' too, but I 'aven't got the pluck, an' that's a fact.

MATT. Now! Turn your head the other way and keep it there. Remember me to Blighty. So long!

[*He moves three steps away from his fellow convict, pauses a few seconds, then suddenly, stooping low, runs to the wall, Left, and over it like a cat. In the minute of silence that follows, one can see the CONVICT listening.*]

FELLOW CONVICT. [*Counting the seconds to himself, up to twenty, in an excited murmur*] Gawd! 'E's past that blighter! [*Listens again.*] Gawd! 'E's orf! [*With realization of his*

fellow's escape comes an itch to attempt it himself.] Shall I 'ave a shot meself? Shall I? Gawd! I must!

[He has just turned to sneak off, when the WARDER's voice is heard off, Right.]

WARDER. You, man, there! Where's your mate?

FELLOW CONVICT. 'Ad a call, sir. *[He stands still.]*

VOICE OF WARDER. *[Nearing]* What d'you mean?

FELLOW CONVICT. Went over to that wall, sir.

WARDER. *[Appearing]* He's not there. Now then! Where is he?

FELLOW CONVICT. No use arstin' me. I don' know where he is.

WARDER. Come with me. *[He marches sharply along the wall back, towards the Left. Halting.]* Convict! Out there! Answer! Warder! You, Williams! Anyone passed you? Lost a man here!

VOICE OF SECOND WARDER. No one's passed.

FIRST WARDER. Sharp, then! There's a man gone!

[SECOND WARDER appears on the top of the wall.]

SECOND WARDER. He must ha' got past you, then.

FIRST WARDER. Curse this fog! Fire a shot for warning. No, don't, or we'll have others running for it. Muster sharp and get off home and report—that's the only thing. *[To CONVICT]* Here, you! Keep your mouth shut. You know all about it, I bet.

FELLOW CONVICT. Not me, sir. 'E just said 'e 'ad a call to 'ave tea with the Duchess; an' I went on pickin' up, knowin' you was in an 'urry.

FIRST WARDER. Mind your lip! Come on, Williams. March, you!

They are marching, Right, as the curtain falls.

EPISODE II

Seven hours have passed. The moor in the dark and the fog, close to the main road. Nothing visible.

VOICE OF FIRST WARDER. What the hell's the use of picketing this blighted road—you can see nothing!

VOICE OF SECOND WARDER. I've seen two cops made just here. When a man's out on a night like this, it's human nature to cling to the road.

FIRST WARDER. But he may be anywhere.

SECOND WARDER. If he's travelling at all, he's on a road. You can't make it on the moor in fog as thick as this.

FIRST WARDER. He may have headed for Cornworthy.

SECOND WARDER. They never go that way—too afraid of Fox Tor Mire.

FIRST WARDER. Or Tavistock?

SECOND WARDER. Well, that road's picketed all right.

FIRST WARDER. I'd flog for escapes. They never think of us—out after these blighters nights like this. It's too bad, you know. Got a drain of the stuff?

SECOND WARDER. Here you are. Put it to your mouth by the smell.

FIRST WARDER. If I get this cove, I'll let him know it. 'Tisn't in nature not to feel murderous towards a chap that keeps you out all night in this sort o' muck! *[He drinks.]*

SECOND WARDER. Leave some for me, mate. *[In a whisper]* What was that? Hark! *[They listen.]*

FIRST WARDER. Don't 'ear nothing.

[He is about to put the flask to his mouth again.]

SECOND WARDER. Thought I heard a scraping noise. Shall I show a glim?

FIRST WARDER. Better not! *[They listen.]*

SECOND WARDER. There's ponies round here.

FIRST WARDER. This fellow was a toff.

SECOND WARDER. Um! Captain in the War.

FIRST WARDER. Him that killed the 'tec in Hyde Park. He's a sporty beggar. Got blood in him. That's the worst sort when it comes to an escape—they run till they drop.

SECOND WARDER. Man of education—might have had more sense than to run for it. He must know he can't get off.

FIRST WARDER. There's a spirit in some of these higher-class chaps you can't break. D'you know that lawyer in the left wing—embezzlement? That chap gives me the creeps. He's got the self-possession of an image.

SECOND WARDER. I'm sorry for some of these fellows, but I'm damned if I'm ever sorry for a gentleman. They ought to know better than to get themselves here. And, as you say, they've got the devil's brass.

FIRST WARDER. Still—up on the ladder and down with a whump—it hits 'em harder than it does the others.

SECOND WARDER. [*Yawning*] Wish I was in bed! [*Startlingly.*] There it is again! [*They listen.*] It'll be a pony. A warder's life's about the limit. If it wasn't for the missus, I'd sooner sweep streets.

FIRST WARDER. I've got used to it, barring a circus like this. The devil himself couldn't get used to that. It's only fit for the movies.

SECOND WARDER. I believe you. Did you see that picture with Duggie in it? 'Ow'd you think 'e does that roof business? We got some pretty tidy cat burglars, but I don't believe there's one could do what he does.

FIRST WARDER. Well, I'll tell you. I think he has spring heels; and I notice his hands are very blurry in the picture. I believe he holds a rope, and they take that out afterwards, by some process.

SECOND WARDER. Never thought o' that! But when he falls and catches on that ledge?

FIRST WARDER. That's an optical deception. Some of those movie jossers ought to be in prison, the way they deceive the public.

SECOND WARDER. I never saw anything on the screen I liked better than "My Old Dutch"! That fair got me. I took the missus, and I tell you there wasn't a dry eye about the pair of us.

FIRST WARDER. Charlie knocks *me*. I feel a better man after I've seen 'im. Now, why is that?

SECOND WARDER. 'E's very 'uman. Must make a pot of money.

FIRST WARDER. I'm wet through—give me another drain. [*Gurgling sounds.*] If I catch that chap, you'll 'ave to stop me quick, or I'll manhandle him for sure.

SECOND WARDER. Same here. We'd better toss up which stops the other. Call!

FIRST WARDER. 'Eads.

SECOND WARDER. Which is it? Throw a glim.

[*The FIRST WARDER throws from an electric torch the first light of the scene. Their two faces, on the footlight side of the road, are seen close together over the coin.*]

SECOND WARDER. Tails—You've lost. [*The glim is dowsed.*] 'Ow do we stand, then? Do I stop you, or do you stop me?

FIRST WARDER. You stop me.

SECOND WARDER. No, I won. That means *I* get the go at him. Lawd Gawd! what a night! Just feel if that rope's all right across the road.

FIRST WARDER. It's taut. Bit too low, though—ought to catch him mid-thigh by rights.

SECOND WARDER. You trust me, old hoss; if it catches 'im as high as that, he stops and goes off sideways, or turns and runs back. It should catch him just below the knee. Then, ten to one he goes over, and we're on to him before he can get up. He'll be goin' a good bat, remember. You'll find me on 'is 'ead when you come to stoppin' me.

FIRST WARDER. To think we can't even smoke. D'you hold with givin' prisoners tobacco, Williams?

SECOND WARDER. On the whole, I do. It sweetens 'em,

and that's better for us. I'd give 'em two pipes a week, and stop 'em if they gave a warder any trouble. I've got one or two fellers I'm quite fond of. I'd be glad for 'em to have a smoke every day. Listen! [*They listen. In a whisper.*] Footsteps! They are!

FIRST WARDER. Yes.

SECOND WARDER. [*Still in a whisper*] Look here, mate! Just before he gets to the rope, I'll throw the light into his face, then dowse it sharp. He'll start to run forward and go head foremost. Stand by! [*They listen.*]

FIRST WARDER. He's comin' on! Suppose it isn't him?

SECOND WARDER. Must chance that. I'll throw the light as I say—[*A moment of utter black tenseness, during which the footsteps are heard clearer and clearer.*] Now! Stand by!

[*He flashes the light on the figure of MATT advancing along the road. The light is dowsed, the WARDERS rush forward. Darkness and the sound of a scramble.*]

SECOND WARDER'S VOICE. I've got him!

FIRST WARDER'S VOICE. [*Half strangled*] No, you ruddy fool—you've got me!

The curtain falls.

EPISODE III

Thirty-two hours have passed. A bedroom at an Inn on the moor. Dark with streaks of daylight coming in from two curtained windows, back, opening on to a long balcony. Between them a bed juts into the room. Right, forward, a dressing-table with chair. Left, back, a washstand. Left, forward, a door opening inwards. At foot of the bed a chair with a woman's undergarments thrown on it. A dressing-gown over the foot-rail of the bed, some slippers on the left side of the bed. A SHINGLED LADY asleep in the bed. Knocking on the door, Left.

LADY. [*Sleepily*] Come in!

[*A MAID enters with a can of hot water, which she places on the washstand, Left.*]

MAID. 'Alf past seven, madam.

LADY. [*Yawning*] What sort of day?

MAID. Foggy still. Taking a bath, madam?

LADY. Yes. Oh! My husband's coming back this evening. I'm to be moved back to the double room.

MAID. Yes, madam; they told me. [*She has drawn aside the curtains, Left, and now moves round and draws back the curtains, Right.*]

That escaped convict, madam; they haven't got him yet.

LADY. No? How thrilling!

MAID. It's the fog. He's been out nearly two days. They say it's the young man who killed the detective in Hyde Park, that made such a fuss.

LADY. Oh? That Captain Denant! I remember. It might have been worse, then.

MAID. Of course they'll catch him—no one ever gets off.

LADY. Don't they?

MAID. Oh! no, madam! It wouldn't never do.

LADY. I should have thought in fog like this——

MAID. You see, they got to eat and get clothes. That's where they're caught.

LADY. [*Yawning*] This horrible fog!—one can't ride or fish, or even walk. Shall I get up, or shall I——?

MAID. [*Rather coldly*] Just as you please, madam.

LADY. [*With a laugh*] Well, I suppose I'd better.

MAID. I'll turn the bath on.

LADY. Thank you.

[*The MAID goes out, and the LADY, in her pyjamas, emerges from bed, feels for her slippers, and puts on her dressing-gown. She goes to a window, and looks out. It is a French window, and slightly open on a short hook.*]

LADY. Ugh! What a day!

[*Taking sponge and bath towel from the washstand, she goes to the door and out. As soon as the door is shut there is a commotion where the bed touches the wall, and from behind the window curtain MATT DENANT cautiously emerges, glances quickly round,*

and stretches himself. He looks haggard, sodden, and crumpled, and has his boots in his hand.

MATT. [Muttering] A lady! Dash it! I must get out!

[He goes to the window and looks cautiously out, then recoils, drawing in his breath with a hiss. Then, after once more glancing round the room, he steps to the door.]

LADY'S VOICE. [Off] I simply can't take cold baths!

[MATT flattens himself against the wall, so that he will be behind the door if it is opened. And suddenly it is.]

LADY'S VOICE. [In doorway] Let me know when the water's hot, please.

MAID'S VOICE. [Off] Yes, madam.

The LADY re-enters, and passing the door knob from her right hand to her left behind her as she naturally would, closes it without seeing MATT, and crosses to the dressing-table, where she sits down and takes up a brush to brush her shingled hair. MATT moves quickly to the door, and has his hand on the handle, when his image passes into the mirror. The LADY drops the brush, and faces round with an exclamation on her open mouth.

MATT. Hush! It's quite O.K.

LADY. Who—how—what d'you mean by coming into my room? [MATT drops the door handle, turning the key in the lock.]

MATT. [In a low voice] Really, I'm most frightfully sorry. [Suddenly the fact that he is the escaped convict dawns on her.]

LADY. You're the escaped—— [She starts up to go to the window and call for help; but stops at the gestures he makes.]

MATT. I wonder if you'd mind awfully speaking pianissimo.

LADY. [Tensely] What made you come in here? How did you get in?

MATT. I've been under the bed for hours. You see, I couldn't tell it was a lady.

LADY. D'you mean my hair?

MATT. Oh no! I couldn't see that.

LADY. I didn't snore?

MATT. No; but that's not an infallible test of sex. I didn't either, or you'd have heard me.

LADY. D'you mean to say you went to sleep?

MATT. I'm afraid I did. Of course, if I'd known——

[*A pause.*]

LADY. Well, as you're a gentleman, aren't you going?

MATT. I'd simply love to. But where?

LADY. Really, I can't tell you.

MATT. Look at me! What can one do in these togs?

LADY. D'you expect me to lend you some?

MATT. Hardly. But I'd be eternally grateful if you'd give me something to eat.

LADY. [*Opening a drawer and taking out some chocolate*] This is pretty cool, you know. I ought to ring and hand you over.

MATT. Yes. But—you look such a sport.

LADY. [*Subtly flattered*] I know who you are. Your name's in the paper. But do you realize my position?

MATT. Afraid I only realize my own.

LADY. If I don't hand you over, how on earth are you going to get out of here without being seen?

MATT. Might I have that chocolate?

LADY. [*Taking it from the dressing-table drawer*] It's only local.

MATT. That won't deter me. I've been forty hours on a piece of bread and two raw potatoes. [*He takes the chocolate, bites some off, and puts the rest in his pocket.*] Would you mind frightfully if I drank some water?

LADY. Of course not.

[*MATT goes over to the washstand. When his back is turned she springs to action, but instead of going to door or window, rapidly conceals underneath the bedclothes the corsets and underclothes flung on the chair at the foot of the bed, then returns to the dressing-table. MATT is drinking deeply.*]

MATT. [*Turning*] That's good. Ever had the hunted feeling? [*She shakes her head.*] Well, don't! A coursed hare is nothing to it. Oh! I am so jolly stiff!

LADY. [*Thrilled in spite of herself*] Do you know you're only three miles from the Prison?

MATT. I do. The first night I meant to get near Exeter by morning, and where d'you think I was? A mile from where I started. I'd been ringing. That's what you do in fog. Is that a razor?

LADY. [*On stilts*] My husband's. Why? [*As MATT takes it up.*] No! There's a limit, Captain Denant. You can't have a weapon.

MATT. No, of course! But would you mind awfully if I shaved? You see, like this [*Passes his hand over his chin*] I haven't an earthly, even if I could get clothes. There's nothing more attractive than a three days' beard. [*While speaking he has lathered himself without a brush.*] I'm a very quick shaver. It takes me three minutes. I can do it in thirty-two and a half strokes.

LADY. [*Gasping*] Well, I never—It takes me [*hand to her neck*]*—that is—I mean—Have you nearly been caught?*

MATT. [*Between scraping motions of the razor*] Twice I've been within twenty feet of the hounds——

LADY. Hounds!

MATT. Human! Just out of their jaws. [*Groans.*] D'you know anything so frightful as a shave like this?

LADY. Well, really——

MATT. I mean except, of course, not having it.

LADY. How did you get in here?

MATT. You see, I *did* so want a dry night, so I hid up and waited till every light was out. I tried to get in below, and couldn't; then I made a boss shot at the corner of the balcony and fell on my back—— Did you feel a sort of earthquake? No? I did. When I got over that, I had another shot at a pillar and made it that time. I chose your window because it was open—— hooked it up again and slid straight under the bed. I meant to sneak some clothes, and be off before daylight, but I only woke up when the maid came in. [*She indicates a towel; he steepes it in water and wipes his face.*] D'you mind if I put on my boots?

[*He stoops and puts them on.*]

LADY. So you actually slept under there?

MATT. Alas! I did.

LADY. Well! It's about the limit.

MATT. Will be if I get clear—no one ever has.

LADY. Tell me, Captain Denant, weren't you at Harcheston with my brother—he used to talk of a Matt Denant, who was an awfully good runner.

MATT. Quite likely. I was at school with an awful lot of brothers. What was his name?

LADY. No. That won't do.

MATT. You're right. Never tell a convict anything he can tell anybody else.

LADY. I really don't see how I can help you.

MATT. Nor do I, worse luck!

LADY. I read your trial.

MATT. [*Standing up*] And you think me a bad lot, of course. [*Bitterly*] D'you know how I spend most of my time in prison? Holding imaginary conversations with the respectable.

LADY. [*With a smile*] Respectable! D'you think you're holding a real one now?

MATT. I certainly don't. . . . I . . . I beg your pardon. . . . You know what I mean. But I bet most people have put me down a rotter.

LADY. Was all you said true?

MATT. Gospel.

LADY. I suppose they do hunt those girls rather.

MATT. Yes, but you know, I didn't even really see red. I've been sorry enough for that poor chap.

LADY. Well, Captain Denant, what now?

MATT. You've been most awfully kind and I don't want to impose on you; but I shall never get out of here as I am.

LADY. Why not?

MATT. [*Jerking his head towards the window*] They're too thoughtful. There's a picket out there. [*The LADY turns to the window and looks out; then she turns to MATT and finds him smiling.*] Oh! No, I wasn't scared. One doesn't give one's own kind away.

LADY. I don't know that. Go and try some of those other rooms. Try the couple next door to me.

[*A knock on the door.* BOTH stand alert.]

LADY. Yes?

VOICE OF MAID. [*Off*] The bath water's hot now, madam.

LADY. All right. Thank you. [*Her finger is on her lips.*]
D'you think she could hear us?

MATT. Hope not. [*Going close.*] Thanks most awfully. You don't know how decent it's been after a year in there, to talk to a lady. I won't leave any traces.

LADY. What are you going to do?

MATT. Wait till he's looking the other way, sneak along the balcony, drop at the end, and bolt for it again.

LADY. Are you still a good runner?

MATT. Pretty fair, if I wasn't so stiff.

LADY. [*After a long look at him*] No! Look here! When I go to my bath I'll make sure there's no one. If I don't come back, slip down the stairs, they're almost opposite. In the hall, hanging, you'll find my husband's old Burberry and fishing basket, rod, and fishing hat; a long brown Burberry, with stains, and flies in the hat. Put them on and go out of the front door; the river's down to the left. Can you fish? [*At his nod.*] You'd better, then. The bathroom's not that side, so I shan't see you. But—whistle "Lady, be good," if you know it.

MATT. Rather! It's the only tune that's got into prison. Well, I can't thank you—you're just a brick!

[*He holds out his hand.*]

LADY. [*Taking it*] Good luck! [*She passes him to the door.*] Wait a second! [*Getting a flask from drawer.*] Take this. If you see anyone looking at you—drink! Nothing gives one more confidence in a man than to see him drinking.

MATT. Splendid! What are you going to say to your husband?

LADY. Um! Yes! He comes to-night. Well, if he doesn't like it, he'll have to lump it. Oh! And these two pounds. It's all I've got here.

[She has taken two pounds out of her bag lying on the dressing-table.]

MATT. *[Moved]* By George! I think you're sublime!

LADY. I'm afraid I doubt it.

MATT. If I'm caught, I shall say I pinched everything, of course; and if I get clear, I'll——

LADY. Oh! don't bother about that! Get behind the door now.

[MATT gets behind the door, and she opens it and goes out. After a moment she returns.]

LADY. All clear!

[Then, closing the door behind her, she goes. MATT takes a look round the room to see that he has not left any trace, and moves softly to the door. His hand is on the handle, when it is opened by the MAID; he has just time to shrink behind it while she stands looking curiously round the room, as if for somebody or something.]

LADY'S VOICE. *[Off]* Ellen! D'you mind going and getting me the suit I sent down to dry last night?

MAID. *[Starting]* Yes, madam. *[She goes, closing the door.]*

[MATT has just time for a breath of relief when it is opened again and the LADY reappears.]

LADY. *[Seeing him breathless]* This is a bit hectic. *[In a whisper]* Now! Quick!

[MATT dives past her. She stands a moment, hustles out her underclothing from under the bedclothes, then drawing the door to, goes to the window, opens it a little wider, and stands there listening. In half a minute the faint strains of "Lady, be good," whistled, are heard.]

LADY. *[Waving a stocking like a hat. Under her breath]* Gone away!

[Whistling "Lady, be good," she crosses jauntily towards the door, meeting the MAID, who is coming in with the dried suit. Continuing to whistle, she passes her with a roll of the eyes, leaving the MAID in three minds as]

The curtain falls.

PART II

EPISODE IV

Seven hours have passed. Dartmeet. An open space of fern and grass above the river and away from trippers.

[MATT, who has been working along the river all the morning, is squatting with his catch beside him—some eight smallish trout. He is eating the last of his chocolate and drinking diligently from the already empty flask. The more so as an OLD GENTLEMAN in Lowat tweeds is straying towards him. MATT begins taking his rod to pieces.

OLD GENTLEMAN. [*Approaching from Left*] Afternoon! Cleared up too well for you, I'm afraid.

MATT. Yes, it's a bit bright now.

OLD GENTLEMAN. Best eating in the world, those little brown chaps. Except perhaps the blue trout in the Tirol. "Blaue forellen" with butter and potatoes, and a bottle of Vöslauer Goldeck, eh?

MATT. My Golly, yes! [*He looks wolfishly at his trout.*

OLD GENTLEMAN. [*Eyeing him askance*] Very foggy this morning. Worst point about the moor, these fogs. Only good for convicts—um?

MATT. [*Subduing a start*] Escapes, you mean? But they never get clear, I believe.

OLD GENTLEMAN. No, I'm told; but they try, you know—they try. I've often wondered what I should do if I blundered into an escaped convict.

MATT. Yes, sir; bit of a problem.

OLD GENTLEMAN. [*Sitting down on his overcoat*] Between the Law and one's gentlemanly instincts—if it's gentlemanlike to dally with a felon—I wonder!

MATT. [*Warming to the subject*] A chap who tries to escape must be a sportsman, anyway. He takes a pretty long chance.

OLD GENTLEMAN. Yes, I don't envy a man in this country; we're a law-abiding people. I remember being very much struck with the difference in America last year—vital race, that—sublime disregard of the law themselves, and a strong sense of moral turpitude in others. Been in America?

MATT. I was out West ranching when the war broke out.

OLD GENTLEMAN. Indeed! Judging by the films, escaping justice is still fashionable there. I think I prefer a more settled country.

MATT. Personally, I've got rather a complex. Escaped from Germany in the war.

OLD GENTLEMAN. Did you? How very interesting!

MATT. If you want to get thin. It's a top-hole cure for adipose. An escape's no picnic.

OLD GENTLEMAN. I imagine not, indeed. Where did you get over the border?

MATT. Holland, after three days and nights on beets and turnips. Do you know the turnip in a state of nature, sir? He's a homely fellow—only beaten by the beet. Beg your pardon, sir, it slipped out. By the way, a convict got off the day before yesterday.

OLD GENTLEMAN. Yes, I saw that—a Captain Matt Denant. I read his case with interest at the time. How did it strike you?

MATT. [*On guard*] Don't believe I remember it.

OLD GENTLEMAN. What? The Hyde Park case?

MATT. Oh! Ah! yes. There was a girl. In those cases they might wait till you complain.

OLD GENTLEMAN. The detective was undoubtedly doing his duty. And yet, quite a question—Rather dangerous giving the police a discretion on morals. The police are very like ourselves; and—er—most of us haven't got discretion, and the rest haven't got morals. The young man didn't complain, I think. D'you happen to recollect?

MATT. [*With an uneasy look*] So far as I remember, he said she was an intellectual.

[*The OLD GENTLEMAN has taken out a cigar-case and is offering it.*

OLD GENTLEMAN. Smoke?

MATT. Thanks very much. I've got into a bad habit of coming out without tobacco. [*They bite and light cigars.*

OLD GENTLEMAN. I suppose one might run across that convict fellow any moment. It would be a little like meeting an adder. The poor thing only wants to get away from you. And yet, if you don't break its back, ten to one it'll bite a dog. I had two dogs die of snakebite. It's a duty, perhaps—what do you say?

MATT. Probably. But I don't always do mine.

OLD GENTLEMAN. Oh! don't you? I'm so glad of that. Neither do I.

MATT. Do you know that prison? It's a bad style of architecture.

OLD GENTLEMAN. No. The fact is, I've had the misfortune in my time to send a good many people to prison. And in those days I did make a point of seeing a prison now and then. I remember I used to give my Juries a pass to go and see where they sent their fellow-beings. Once I tested whether they went to look round or not, and out of three Juries—no, it was four—how many do you think had had the curiosity?

MATT. None.

OLD GENTLEMAN. Isn't that a little cynical? [*With his sideway bird-like glance.*] No, it was—one. Ha!

MATT. Who'd want to go into a prison? I'd as soon visit the Morgue. The bodies there aren't *living*, anyway.

OLD GENTLEMAN. They tell me prisons are much improved. They've introduced a human feeling.

MATT. Have they? Splendid! What was the date of that?

OLD GENTLEMAN. [*His eyes busy*] They've abolished the arrows, anyway. And I believe they don't shave their heads now. Do you know any convicts?

MATT. [*With a wriggle*] I? No. Only one.

OLD GENTLEMAN. Indeed? And is he interesting?

MATT. The most interesting chap I know.

OLD GENTLEMAN. Ha! Suppose this escaped convict suddenly turned up here. [*Jerking his thumb towards MATT.*] What should you do?

MATT. Run like a hare.

OLD GENTLEMAN. Dear me, yes. I think it would depend on whether anyone was about. Human nature is very—er—sensitive. D’you find this climate bracing? Dartmoor has quite a reputation.

MATT. Overrated—I think.

OLD GENTLEMAN. You know it well?

MATT. No; this is my first visit.

OLD GENTLEMAN. And will you be here long?

MATT. Hope not.

OLD GENTLEMAN. Beautiful spot—Dartmeet!

MATT. I prefer Two Bridges.

[*Putting up his rod and whistling “Lady, be good.”*]

OLD GENTLEMAN. Ah! What fly have you been using?

MATT. Just a tag.

OLD GENTLEMAN. I’ve not fished for years. [*As MATT suddenly passes his hand over his brow under his hat.*] Anything the matter?

MATT. Afraid I shall have to abandon your excellent cigar. I’ve enjoyed it, but I’m smoking on a rather empty stomach.

[*He looks ruefully at the unsmoked portion of his cigar, and pitches it away.*]

OLD GENTLEMAN. Dear me! Yes. I remember that feeling coming over me once at the Royal Acad my banquet—just before I had to make a speech. [*Another of his bird-like glances.*] Tobacco must be one of the great deprivations in prison, I always think. Didn’t you find that so in—in—Germany?

MATT. [*Breathing rather fast and completing the dismantlement of his fishing rod*] Oh! we got tobacco now and then.

OLD GENTLEMAN. And empty stomachs too, I'm afraid.

MATT. Yes.

OLD GENTLEMAN. One never ceases to be grateful to those who endured such things. [*Offering his cigar-case.*] Will you try again after tea? These moor teas with cream and jam.

MATT. [*Taking it*] Well, thank you, sir. I shall down him next time.

[*MATT is now ready for departure, for he has been getting increasingly uneasy with this OLD GENTLEMAN. He takes up his basket and lays the fish within it.*]

OLD GENTLEMAN. Well [*Getting up*] I must be getting on too. It's been very pleasant. I've enjoyed our little talk. At my time of life one doesn't often get new sensations.

MATT. [*Nonplussed*] Good Lord, sir! Have I given you any?

OLD GENTLEMAN. Well, I don't remember ever having talked before to a prisoner who'd escaped from—Germany.

MATT. Good-bye, sir.

OLD GENTLEMAN. Good-bye, Captain Denant—[*MATT starts.*] I hope you'll have a pleasant journey, especially as no one seems to have noticed our little chat.

MATT. [*Staring at him*] D'you mind frightfully telling me how you spotted me?

OLD GENTLEMAN. Not at all! First, the way you looked at your trout—shall I say—er—wolfishly? And then—forgive me—your legs.

MATT. [*Drawing up his Burberry and contemplating his legs*] Yes. I hoped you'd think I was a leader of fashion.

OLD GENTLEMAN. And there was another thing—your obvious sympathy with yourself.

MATT. That's a prison habit, sir. You're not allowed to sympathize with other people, for fear of contaminating them. Before I got into quod I don't remember ever feeling sorry for myself. But I doubt if I shall ever again feel sorry for anyone else.

OLD GENTLEMAN. That must be very natural. Well, it's

been most interesting, because now you see I know what I should do——

MATT. [*Intently*] Is it indiscreet to ask, sir?

OLD GENTLEMAN. Well, Captain Denant, this time—I say *this* time—wink the other eye. Good-day to you!

MATT. Good-day, sir. It's most frightfully sporting of you. For the moment I feel quite human.

OLD GENTLEMAN. Do you know, that's been rather the effect on me. Original sin, I suppose. Good-day!

[*He goes off, watching the smoke of his cigar and smiling faintly to himself.* On MATT, affected by kindness,

The curtain falls.

EPISODE V

An hour has passed. On the Moor; a high spot.

[FOUR TRIPPERS, two men and two women, disgorged from a Ford car, are picnicking. One of the men, about fifty, in blue clothes, has a Merchant Service look and a concertina; the other looks more like a shopkeeper, and is perhaps fifty-five. His wife is a stout woman, about forty, of mellow appearance. The other woman is the shopkeeper's sister, dried-up and spinsterish. Their clothes are of a suitable nature—some feathers. They are all eating heavily.]

WIFE. Captain, you're a prophet—considerin' what it was when we left Ashburton. I call this lovely! [*Eats.*]

CAPTAIN. Takes a bit o' weather to flummox a sailor, ma'am. [*Drinks.*]

WIFE. "You trust the Captain," I said to Pinkem this morning, didn't I, father? I knew, you see; [*archly*] my corns weren't shootin'.

SISTER. That's not very nice, Fanny.

WIFE. Why not? I'd like to see someone who 'asn't corns, if the truth was known. 'Ave another of these cut rounds,

Dolly, and cheer up. Father, don't you eat any more cream—your eyes are yellor.

SHOPKEEPER. When I first came to Devonshire I could put away 'alf a pound o' cream at a meal.

WIFE. Yes, and it spoiled your temper for life.

SHOPKEEPER. Am I bad-tempered, Dolly?

SISTER. So-so, James.

SHOPKEEPER. What do you say, Captain?

CAPTAIN. You keep it for your wife, my boy. Outside the bosom of your family you're a perfect cherub.

WIFE. Captain, you're an 'opeless Benedick.

CAPTAIN. Bachelor born, ma'am.

WIFE. With a wife in every port, eh?

SISTER. Oh! That reely isn't nice, Fanny; so old-fashioned too.

CAPTAIN. Is it, ma'am?

WIFE. Now, Captain, don't go shockin' Dolly. Oh! There's an insect on my skirt! I never seen one like it.

SHOPKEEPER. Kill it, then.

WIFE. Why?

SHOPKEEPER. Always kill what you don't know.

WIFE. [*Flipping it off*] It's only a biddle—poor thing! Give us a tune, Captain. [*The CAPTAIN draws a long blast from his concertina.*] Hallo! 'Oo's this?

[*MATT, in Burberry, with rod and basket, has appeared Left, and stands lifting his hat.*]

MATT. Afternoon! Wonder if you could put me right for Bovey?

SHOPKEEPER. Bovey! That's a goodish step—matter of twelve miles, I should say.

MATT. My Lord! Not really?

SHOPKEEPER. You go down the 'ill, through Ponsworthy to Widcombe, and up the 'ill, turn to the left, and ask again.

MATT. I see. Will there be anyone to ask?

SHOPKEEPER. I shouldn't think so.

CAPTAIN. Had any sport, sir?

MATT. [*Opening the basket*] Eight, rather small.

WIFE. My! Don't they look nice! Such good eatin' too.

MATT. Would you like them, ma'am?

WIFE. [*With affected restraint*] I'm sure it's very good of you.

CAPTAIN. Don't you miss the chance, Mrs. Pinkem; nothing like moor trout, with a moor appetite.

SISTER. [*Distantly*] I'm sure it's most kind, from a stranger.

WIFE. [*Suddenly*] Well, I don't know, if you're so obliging. 'And me the *Daily Mail*, father. I'll wrap 'em up; and thank you very much. I quite appreciate it.

MATT. That's splendid! [*He hands them.*] Turned out quite nice, hasn't it? Have you come far?

SHOPKEEPER. From Ashburton—ten mile.

MATT. Heard anything there of the escaped convict?

SHOPKEEPER. What about it? Haven't looked at the paper last day or two.

WIFE. Another escape!—Oh, my!

MATT. Rather! He got off in the fog, night before last.

SISTER. I always hate to think of one of those dreadful men at large. You can't sleep in your bed.

CAPTAIN. Don't you get *too* excited, ma'am. Think of the choice 'e's got.

WIFE. [*Scanning the paper*] Why! It's the man that killed the poor detective in 'Yde Park! That villain! It says 'ere they nearly got him—twice.

[*MATT, who is eyeing them closely, eyes a loaf even more closely, and tries to manœuvre into a position to annex it.*

SHOPKEEPER. I 'ope everybody's helping to catch him. He must be a regular desperado. That was a bad case. I never believed the girl.

SISTER. I should think not, indeed!

SHOPKEEPER. Nor the young man neither. They were up to no good there. They tell me those London parks are in a proper state.

CAPTAIN. They ain't a Sunday School, that's certain.

WIFE. Fie, Captain!

SISTER. [*Acidly*] I believe some people quite sympathized with him. Fancy!

MATT. Well, if you won't think it too eccentric, I did, for one.

SHOPKEEPER. You!—Why?

MATT. I thought he had devilish hard luck.

SHOPKEEPER. Ah! there's always a fuss made about the Law. You can't even 'ang a woman for murderin' her 'usband without a lot o' 'ysterical nonsense. Look at that case not long ago—there was a petition as long as your arm.

CAPTAIN. I remember. The young chap was a steward. I don't recall this Hyde Park case.

WIFE. Why! the detective arrested one o' those women this young man had been sittin' with—a gentleman he was too—and if he didn't 'it him 'an break 'is 'ead, an' kill 'im, poor man!

CAPTAIN. Then why didn't they string him up?

MATT. The jury found it was a quarrel, not an attempt to evade arrest. Besides, in falling the detective hit his head on the iron railings of the Row, and the doctors said he died of the concussion.

SHOPKEEPER. That didn't ought to have got 'im off. He hit the man. If 'e 'adn't 'it him, 'e wouldn't have fallen.

MATT. Exactly! Brilliant! But if the detective hadn't seized him, he wouldn't have hit him.

SHOPKEEPER. Well! *I'd 'ave hung 'im.*

WIFE. Don't be so bloodthirsty, father!

SHOPKEEPER. Well, I would! Hitting an officer for doing his duty. Sitting with a woman in the Park, too! He only got off because he was quality.

MATT. Don't you think that's a superstition?

[*The SHOPKEEPER glares at him, but decides that he is a gentleman, and therefore prejudiced, and only snorts slightly.*]

SISTER. Did they punish the woman?

MATT. What for, ma'am?

SISTER. *I'd keep them shut up; then they wouldn't tempt young men—the 'arpies!*

MATT. [*Unexpectedly*] Oh! God!

[*They all stare at him. Then the SHOPKEEPER fatuously breaks the silence.*]

SHOPKEEPER. Can't say I was ever tempted by a woman.

MATT. No, you've got a Ford car, I see. D'you find them good in this sort of country?

SHOPKEEPER. [*Distantly*] I do, sir.

MATT. Do they get up these hills?

SHOPKEEPER. I should think so. I'd engage to catch any convict with my car.

MATT. Would you? [*A thought strikes him.*] Splendid!

WIFE. Well, I think we ought to be gettin' 'ome. 'And me the teapot, Captain. Now, Dolly! Never mind those bits o' cake and bread—they're no good. Just leave the deebris. I'd like to be in before dark, with a convict loose like this. He might come prowlin' round, pickin' things up.

[*MATT with a secret movement pockets some scraps.*]

MATT. Good afternoon! Hope you'll enjoy the trout.

[*He moves away out of the picture.*]

WIFE and CAPTAIN. Good afternoon—Good afternoon, sir!

[*MATT salutes and vanishes, Right.*]

SISTER. Here, Fanny! Did you see him pocket the scraps?

WIFE. No! Why's he's a gentleman—didn't you hear his sniffy way o' talkin'?

SISTER. I saw him with my own eyes—two bits of cake and a round.

[*Sound of a car being started.*]

SHOPKEEPER. I say! [*Jumping up.*] What's 'e doin' with the Ford?

CAPTAIN. Hi, there! You, sir!

SHOPKEEPER. He's got in. Hi!

SISTER. The villain!

ALL. Hi! hi! hi!

[*Sound of a levanting car, and a halloed "So long!"*]

[*The TWO MEN run out of the picture.*]

WIFE. Well, I——

SISTER. You! Taking his fish like that! You might ha'

known he was a thief. Why—why—of course! He's the—oh! oh!

WIFE. Dry up, Dolly! 'Ow are we to get 'ome?

[*The Two MEN run back into the picture, breathless.*]

SHOPKEEPER. Well, of all the impudent villains!

CAPTAIN. I'm jiggered!

[*He sits down with his hands on his knees and goes off into wheezy laughter.*]

SISTER. 'Ow *can* you? 'Ow *can* you, Captain? And we talking about him all the time!

CAPTAIN. [*Stopping*] What! Him!

SISTER. The escaped convict! He hadn't the leggins of a gentleman.

CAPTAIN. What! Did *you* look at his legs, ma'am?

WIFE. It's all your fault, Pinkem; you and Dolly's—callin' 'im names. If you 'adn't called 'im names, he wouldn't 'a stole the car—talkin' of hanging 'im! I could see 'im gettin' heated.

SHOPKEEPER. You called 'im a villain yourself. Well—Bovey—we know where to look for him.

CAPTAIN. A blind, old bean.

SHOPKEEPER. I say 'e will go there.

CAPTAIN. I say 'e won't.

SHOPKEEPER. I say 'e'll see we'll think 'e won't, and put the double cross on us.

CAPTAIN. Well, I say, 'e'll see we'll think 'e's going to put the double cross on us.

WIFE. Oh! My corns!

SISTER. Impudence, givin' us 'is fish!

CAPTAIN. Well, there's nothin' for it but tote the things and walk till we get a lift.

WIFE. Oh! my corns are shootin'. I can't walk.

CAPTAIN. Cheerio, ma'am! Be English.

SHOPKEEPER. English! 'Tisn't *your* car.

CAPTAIN. Don't worry, old sport. 'E'll leave that in a ditch when he gets there.

SHOPKEEPER. There—ye-es—John o' Groats?

CAPTAIN. Come along, ma'am. Lift your corns well up. I'll give you a tune.

[They have picked up the gear and are trailing off Right, leaving papers strewn about.]

WIFE. Oh! Look! We've left 'is fish.

SISTER. Fish! Infra dig, I call it. *[She sniffs.]*

WIFE. Nonsense, Dolly! Dish of trout like that'll cost five shillings in Ashburton. May as well 'ave the worth of the petrol 'e'll use. Father, pick 'em up.

[The SHOPKEEPER turns back, picks them up in the "Daily Mail," puts the combination to his nose, finds it good and follows the others off as the CAPTAIN begins to play his concertina and

The curtain falls.

EPISODE VI

Half an hour has passed. An open space with the moor rising from it.

[A MAN in plus fours and his WIFE are returning from a walk. The WIFE has stopped and is moving her foot uneasily.]

WIFE. I've got something in my shoe, Philip.

MAN. What?

WIFE. I've got something in my shoe.

MAN. *[In front, stopping too]* Take it off, then *[Goes back to her.]* Hold on to me.

WIFE. *[Taking off shoe and shaking it]* It isn't in the shoe—it's inside the stocking.

MAN. You can't sit down here; the ground's still wet.

WIFE. There—feel!

MAN. Yes, I can feel it.

WIFE. *[Standing on one leg]* Well! Hold me.

[He holds her and she has slipped her stocking off when there is the sound of an approaching car.]

MAN. Look out! Here's a car!

WIFE. [*Letting her skirt fall and standing on one leg*] Bother!
[*Sound of the car stopping.*]

MAN. Hallo! He's coming to speak to us.

[*The WIFE bends and slips the shoe on hurriedly, but her dress is short. She holds the stocking behind her.*]

MATT. [*Appearing*] Beg your pardon, sir, but can you direct me to Bovey?

MAN. Afraid we're strangers. Pity you didn't ask as you came through Widecombe.

MATT. Well, but it's up this hill, anyway, isn't it?

MAN. Must be, I think. That's the way to Heytor Rock.

MATT. Oh! Can you see the promised land from there?

WIFE. Yes. You go up the hill and turn to the right, then to the left through a gate.

MATT. And ask again, I suppose. [*Preparing to leave.*]
Thanks very much.

MAN. Fine place, the moor, sir. Splendid air.

MATT. [*Dryly*] Oh! Splendid. So dry and clear!

WIFE. [*With a giggle*] Yes, the fog *was* awful yesterday.

MAN. They say Bovey's pretty.

MATT. Yes, I've some Aunts there. Good place for Aunts.

WIFE. [*Laughing*] What makes a good place for Aunts?

MATT. Oh! not too stirring. Awfully good knitting there, I believe.

MAN. Ha! That's good. Ha!

MATT. I must get on, or I shall be late for tea. So I whizz past Heytor rocks——?

WIFE. Yes, and come down on the church.

MATT. Thanks very much. My Aunts are close there, I know. Good afternoon.

[*He lifts his hat discreetly and goes, Right. The MAN and WIFE gaze after him.*]

WIFE. What a nice young man!

MAN. That was good about Aunts. Ha! [*Sound of car moving on.*] Now for your stocking!

WIFE. [*Bending down and taking off her shoe*] I should think he was County, wouldn't you?

MAN. [*Holding her from behind*] Um! Only "County" would drive such a shockin' bad car.

WIFE. He saw my leg and kept his eyes off it. I thought that was charming of him.

MAN. Fellow-feelin'; he had some shockin' leg gear on himself.

WIFE. [*Turning stocking inside out*] See, there it is—a beastly little three-cornered bit of grit. Extraordinary how they get in——

MAN. [*Suddenly*] Look out! Here's a constable on a bike. [*The WIFE drops her skirt and stands balancing again, the stocking in her hand. A very hot CONSTABLE appears, wheeling a bicycle.*]

CONSTABLE. Zeen convict pass?

MAN. [*Astonished*] Convict? No.

CONSTABLE. Zeen anybody?

MAN. Only a car.

CONSTABLE. What zort of car?

MAN. Ford, I think.

CONSTABLE. Whu was in it?

MAN. A man.

CONSTABLE. What zort of man?

MAN. Oh!—er—a gentleman.

CONSTABLE. How d'yu know?

MAN. By his voice.

WIFE. He spoke to us.

CONSTABLE. What d'e zay?

MAN. Asked the way to Bovey.

CONSTABLE. Ha! What 'ad 'e on?

MAN. Long Burberry and a hat like mine; he was quite all right.

CONSTABLE. [*Mopping his face*] Was 'e? Bovey—yu zay?

WIFE. Yes, he had some Aunts there—he was going to tea with them.

CONSTABLE. [*Deeply*] Aunts in Bovey! Did yu direct 'im?

WIFE. We told him to go by Heytor rocks. Wasn't that right?

CONSTABLE. Well, yu've directed the escaped convict.

MAN. [*Alarmed*] No, really! But I tell you——

WIFE. He was quite charming.

CONSTABLE. Was 'e? 'Ow much start's 'e got?

MAN. Oh! not five minutes. Of course, I didn't know—I should never have——

CONSTABLE. [*Muttering and mopping*] This plaguey 'ill!

MAN. Hadn't you better telephone to Bovey?

CONSTABLE. [*Smartly*] Bovey! Why d'yu suppose he spoke to 'ee? Because 'e idn' goin' to Bovey and wants me to think 'e is.

WIFE. But really he was a gentleman.

CONSTABLE. [*Dryly*] Volk 'e stole that car from 'alf an hour gone, don't think so. [*He mops his face.*]

WIFE. I can't believe——

MAN. There were his legs. [*To CONSTABLE, whose eyes are on the lady's leg.*] I noticed they looked like nothing at all.

CONSTABLE. Then why didn' yu stop 'im?

MAN. [*Flustered*] I would have, of course, if I'd suspected for a moment.

CONSTABLE. Stop first—suspect arterwards.

MAN. Well, I'm very sorry. If I'd——

CONSTABLE. 'T'es done now. I must get down along sharp and telephone. [*He turns and wheels his bicycle off to the road.*]

WIFE. [*On one leg*] I don't see why you need be sorry, Philip. He *was* a gentleman.

MAN. A convict's a convict; you can't play about with the Law.

WIFE. Well, we have, that's one comfort. That constable didn't keep *his* eyes off my leg.

MAN. I suppose you'd have had me get into a row with the police!

WIFE. Don't be silly, Philip! You needn't get angry

because your nerves are rattled. No, don't hold me, I can put it on perfectly by myself.

[*She stands wobbling on one leg, and pulls the stocking on.*]

MAN. The brass of that chap—talking about his Aunts!

WIFE. You thought it very funny, when he did.

MAN. If I'd known——

WIFE. Oh! Yes, if you'd known—you haven't an ounce of original sin in you. Thank goodness, I have.

MAN. Where? *I've* never——

WIFE. No, I don't keep it for you.

MAN. Hallo! He's coming back.

WIFE. Who? The constable?

MAN. No—that chap—the convict. [*Sounds of car.*]

WIFE. Hooray!

MAN. What do you mean—hooray! What am I to do? This is infernal.

WIFE. [*Maliciously*] Run out and stop him, of course.

MAN. [*On one leg and the other*] He'd run over me. These chaps are desperate.

WIFE. Well, *I* will, then; and warn him of the constable.

MAN. You won't!—Hallo! He's stopping. That's worse. What the devil shall I do now?

[*The WIFE laughs. Sounds of car stopping. MATT reappears.*]

MATT. Awfully sorry, but my car jibbed. There's another way round, isn't there? Through Widecombe, to the right—I saw a road?

MAN. Um! Well—I—er——

WIFE. Yes, but I shouldn't advise you to take it.

MATT. Must, I'm afraid. My car started to back down the hill.

MAN. I'm afraid—er—that I—er—ought to——

WIFE. My husband means that there's a constable in Widecombe. [*Pointing.*]

MATT. Yes. [*Looking back under his hand.*] I see him.

WIFE. So you'd better go on up.

MATT. There are *two* up there, you see. My car's very sensitive.

WIFE. Oh, dear!

MAN. Joan! [*Resolutely*] Now, sir, that constable's been talking to us. The game's up. If you don't mind, I'll take that car. He says it isn't yours.

MATT. [*Stepping back*] You know that's most frightfully true. But then—it isn't yours either.

MAN. Well, just let's argue it. I'm afraid you're helpless.

MATT. What do you take me for?

MAN. Why—er—the escaped convict, if you know what I mean.

MATT. Oh! Well—even so, I've still got a kick in me. I see your point of view, of course; but unfortunately I've got my own.

MAN. After that constable, I simply can't play about with it.

MATT. Look here! I've got a brain-wave. Let's all go into Widecombe in the car?

MAN. Ah! thanks very much; I thought you'd be sporting.

MATT. You see, if you're with me, I shall get through Widecombe all right, and I'll drop you just on the far side.

MAN. But——! What? No—that won't——

MATT. It's all right. You take me in custody into Widecombe—you can't help it if I whizz through and shoot you out. I want to make it easy for you, and I hope you want to make it easy for me.

MAN. Why should I? An escaped convict!

MATT. What do you call *yourself*?

MAN. What! Just an average man.

MATT. D'you mean to say the average man isn't a sportsman?

MAN. Yes. But I've had warning. I'm up against it.

WIFE. I'll come in the car. If you're with a lady, you'll get through without being spotted.

MATT. Splendid! Thanks ever so! Will you get in?

MAN. Joan!

MATT. Put yourself in my position, sir—

MAN. Look here! I ought to be knocking you down and sitting on your head, if you know what I mean.

MATT. [*Squaring up*] Well, any little thing you've got to do, please do it quickly.

MAN. Well, I mean—that's very crude.

WIFE. [*Ironically*] Oh! no, Philip! Oh, no!

MAN. Well, suppose you let me drive.

MATT. Why should I? I stole the car. Now, madam, shall we start?

WIFE. [*Winding her scarf round her face*] Right-o!

MAN. This is monstrous! Look here, sir, you seem to think——

MATT. I'll tell you what I think—[*Grimly*] I've been in purgatory too long, and I'm going to get out, and you're not going to stop me, if you know what I mean.

MAN. I jolly well am!

WIFE. Philip!

MAN. I'm not going to have it. If you won't surrender, I shall tackle you.

MATT. [*Dangerously*] Oh!

[*He takes a spanner out of his pocket.*]

WIFE. [*Stepping between them—to MATT*] D'you know, I think you'd better go on.

MATT. I think so, too. Sorry to be a boor and bring out a thing like this. [*Tapping the spanner.*] But I'm not playing, you see. [*Sombrely.*] The life we live spoils our sense of humour! Good-bye, ma'am, I'm very grateful to you.

[*He turns and vanishes.*]

MAN. Look here! You're not going like that—I'm damned if you are! Stop!

WIFE. Masterly, Philip! Masterly! [*Sound of a car starting.*] Run! My dear! Run! It's all right. You'll be too late.

MAN. You really are——

[*They stand looking at each other as the sound of the car fails slowly, and* *The curtain falls.*]

EPISODE VII

An hour has passed.

[In a gravel pit on the edge of the moor are a wheelbarrow, with a pick in it, and MATT lying on his face, apparently asleep, waiting for dark.

[From Right comes the figure of a LABOURER. He is a burly great fellow with a shovel. Seeing the recumbent figure, he stands still, gazing. Then, turning, he goes back whence he came. MATT, who has been conscious of this visitor, gathers himself to spring up and rush away. Then he takes a resolution and lies down again in the same attitude, as if asleep. The LABOURER returns, followed by another LABOURER as big as himself. The FIRST LABOURER clears his throat.

MATT. *[Sitting up with his feet under him]* Well, my men! What's the matter with you?

FIRST LABOURER. Beg pardon, zurr. We'm lukin' for th' escaped convict. We 'ad a zort of a thought as ye med be 'err.

MATT. Did you? That's pretty good! And now you see I'm not, suppose you apologize?

FIRST LABOURER. *[Cautiously]* 'Course, ef we knu 'u'm yu werr——

MATT. Whom do you work for?

FIRST LABOURER. Varmer Brownin'. 'Tes 'is grazin' yere.

MATT. I'll see Farmer Browning. It's funny, but I don't altogether like being taken for an escaped convict.

FIRST LABOURER. Yas, I rackon as 'ow yu'd better zee Maester Browning. George, goo and vind Maester. 'E'm in th' orchard long across. *[The SECOND LABOURER goes off, Left.*

FIRST LABOURER. We'm 'ad nues o' this joker, yu zee. Zeemingly 'e pinched a car and we'm found it just back along in the ditch. 'Tes the zame old car, tu.

MATT. What on earth's the car to do with me.

FIRST LABOURER. A don' zay nothin' 'bout that. Maester'll know when 'e comes.

MATT. I'll go and meet him. [*He makes as if to rise.*]

FIRST LABOURER. No, yu zett therr.

MATT. Now, look here, my friend! Do I talk like a convict?

FIRST LABOURER. Can't zay, never 'eerd none. They'm town folk, I rackon—mos'ly.

MATT. Well, I was bred in the country, like you. What wages do you get here?

[*He pulls the flask out of his pocket, whistling "Lady, be good."*]

FIRST LABOURER. Waal, ef yu'm the convict, yu'm a cule customer arter that.

MATT. But why on earth should you *think* I'm the convict? I'm just a fisherman staying at Lustleigh. [*He takes a pull at the empty flask.*] You're making a fool of yourself, you know.

FIRST LABOURER. [*Scratching his head*] Ef so be as yu'm what yu zay yu be, wot d'you goo vur to 'ide yere?

MATT. Hide? I was having a nap out of the wind, before walking home.

FIRST LABOURER. This joker 'ad a fishin'-rod wi' un, tu.

MATT. The convict? Bosh!

FIRST LABOURER. Not zo much bosh, neither.

MATT. Look you, my man, I've had enough of this.

[*He stands up suddenly.*]

[*The LABOURER steps back and lifts his shovel. But at this moment the FARMER and SECOND LABOURER step into the picture from Left, accompanied by a LITTLE GIRL of thirteen or so, who has been riding.*]

FARMER. Now then, now then! That'll du, Jim. Yu there, on my land, kindly give me yure name, and account for yureself. There's a rough customer about, with a fishin'-rod, same as yu.

MATT. Mr. Browning?

FARMER. Ay! that's my name.

MATT. Mine's Matthew Captain Matthew. I'm staying at the Inn at Lustleigh. There's some very absurd mistake. This good trusty dog thinks he's treed a convict.

FARMER. [*Impressed by MATT's accent and air, and the flask in his hand*] Well, sir, when there's these escapes on the moor, we 'ave to be careful. Miss 'Lizabeth, yu run along. [*The LITTLE GIRL does not move, but remains spellbound.*] Constable's just been in wi' nues from Widecombe of the car yonder, and the man that pinched it 'ad a long brown coat, a fishin'-rod, and an 'at like yurn.

MATT. If the constable's here still, you'd better take me to him.

FARMER. No, rackon I'll ask 'im to step over 'ere. George, run and fetch constable, he'm down along by thiccy car.

[*The SECOND LABOURER departs, Right, the FIRST LABOURER retires a little to the Right, leaving the FARMER and MATT by themselves on the Left, the FARMER being on the outside. The LITTLE GIRL still lurks breathless.*]

MATT. Now, Mr. Browning—dash it all!—you ought to know better than this!

FARMER. Oh! I daresay yu'm a gentleman, but so's this convict, seemin'ly. Leastways he'm a captain. Perhaps yu'll tell me the name o' the innkeeper where yu'm stayin' at Lustleigh?

MATT. Has he got a name? I hadn't noticed.

FARMER. No; nor the name of the Inn neither, maybe?

MATT. The Red Lion.

FARMER. Ha!

MATT. Well, it ought to be.

FARMER. And per'aps yu'll show me the clothes yu've got on.

MATT. [*Taking a resolution*] Well, I own up.

LITTLE GIRL. Oh!

FARMER. I thowt yu'd come to it.

MATT. [*Lowering his voice*] Be sporting. Give me a show!

FARMER. Now yu know I can't du that; what's the yuse of askin'?

MATT. Well, I've had forty-eight hours' freedom, and given them a good run. You haven't a cigarette?

FARMER. I don't smoke them things Jim, got a fag for this gentleman?

[FIRST LABOURER brings out a packet of cigarettes which he holds out. MATT takes one and lights it from a match sheltered in the horny hands of the LABOURER, who then retires again, Right, with the shovel.]

MATT. Thanks very much! [He sits on the wheelbarrow.]

[There ensues a silence. The LITTLE GIRL steals up to MATT.]

LITTLE GIRL. [Holding out a small book] Would you mind giving me your autograph?

FARMER. Miss 'Lizabeth!

LITTLE GIRL. Well, I've only just begun—I *have* to ask anybody at all thrilling.

MATT. [With a grin] Ink or—blood?

LITTLE GIRL. Oh! that'd be splendid!

MATT. Mine or—yours?

LITTLE GIRL. Oh! I've got a fountain pen. [Hands it. MATT writes his name.] Thank you so much.

MATT. [Handing back the book] Shake hands on it. [The LITTLE GIRL and he shake hands.] When you're an old woman you'll be able to say you met Murderous Matt.—Mr. Browning, you won't give me a chance?

FARMER. Aid and abet a convict? No, no, Captain!

MATT. Vermin, eh? [Looking round him.] Well, you see, I've gone to earth. D'you hold with digging foxes out?

FARMER. I do, the varminths!

MATT. Ah! Well, you may thank your stars you were never in prison.

FARMER. No, an' I 'ope I'll never du nothin' to putt me there.

MATT. Take care you don't have bad luck, that's all.

FARMER. Bad luck? I rackon a man as kills a man can think he's havin' *gude* luck if he don't swing for it.

MATT. [Sombrely] I meant the poor beggar no harm.

LITTLE GIRL. Have you really killed a man?

MATT. Not yet.

FARMER. [*Removing the pick from the barrow*] Yu struck the blow, and he died of't. What's more, so far as I remember, he was duin' his duty, same as I'm duin' mine.

[*He looks intently at MATT, as if warning him not to try another blow.*]

MATT. You needn't be afraid; there's a child here. If there weren't! I hope you'll see that my friend here [*Pointing to the LABOURER*] has the reward for my capture.

FARMER. 'E can 'ave it; I don' want no reward for duin' my duty.

MATT. [*Nodding gravely*] That's lucky! I appreciate your excellent intentions, Mr. Browning. Glad to have met you! Good-bye!

[*He leaps from the barrow, and with a twist like a footballer evading a tackle, is past him and away to the Left. The LITTLE GIRL claps her hands.*]

FARMER. [*Astonished*] The varmint! Hi! Jim! Arter 'im!

[*The LABOURER utters a sort of roar and starts running. The FARMER is about to follow.*]

LITTLE GIRL. Oh! Mr. Browning!

FARMER. Well?

LITTLE GIRL. Oh! nothing.

FARMER. Darn! [*He follows out, running, Left.*]

[*The CONSTABLE and SECOND LABOURER come hurrying from Right.*]

CONSTABLE. Gone! Which way, missy?

LITTLE GIRL. [*With distant blankness*] I don't know.

CONSTABLE. Come on, then!

[*He and the LABOURER go out, Left, running.*]

LITTLE GIRL. Oh! I do hope he gets off! Oh!

[*On the hue and cry*]

The curtain falls.

EPISODE VIII

A few minutes have passed.

[In the parlour of a cottage of gentility are two maiden ladies—MISS GRACE, about forty-seven, brewing tea at a little table before the fire, Right, and MISS DORA, much younger, still dressed in hunting togs, standing at the open French window, Back.

MISS DORA. There's such a glow on the Cleave, Grace. Most lovely red. We killed. Everybody was looking out for that escaped convict.

MISS GRACE. Did you see him?

MISS DORA. No, thank goodness. Poor hunted wretch!

MISS GRACE. If you think hunted things are poor, why do you go hunting?

MISS DORA. Foxes hunt and expect to be hunted.

MISS GRACE. So do convicts. Sympathy's wasted on them. Tea, Dora.

MISS DORA. This isn't a common convict. It's that Captain Denant, you remember——

MISS GRACE. Oh!—not likely to forget the row we had about his case! Well! it served him right!

MISS DORA. *[Going to the table and sitting down. Looking steadily at her sister]* For a good woman, Grace, you know—you're awfully hard.

MISS GRACE. Tea-cake, please. I like consistency.

MISS DORA. *[Deeply]* I think you're right.

MISS GRACE. *[Surprised]* How?

MISS DORA. It is a shame to hunt a fox—much better to shoot it.

MISS GRACE. There'd soon be no foxes. Don't get *that* bee into your bonnet *here*. What with rabbits, and chained dogs, you've set the farmers by the ears as it is. Wait till we go to Bath. You can have as many bees as you like there.

MISS DORA. I shan't hunt any more.

MISS GRACE. Then you're very foolish, if you enjoy it. Will you come over to the Service with me this evening?

MISS DORA. D'you know what I wish *you'd* say, Grace? "I shan't go to church any more."

MISS GRACE. I wish to God, Dora, you'd give up free thought!

MISS DORA. I wish to God, Grace, you'd give up religion.

MISS GRACE. You only hurt the vicar by it.

MISS DORA. [*Shaking her head*] He's too good a sort to mind.

MISS GRACE. You're too perverse for anything. I've only to say something and you set your will to the opposite.

MISS DORA. My dear, my will is nothing to yours. I haven't the ego for it.

MISS GRACE. [*Coldly*] You mean I'm egoistic? Thank you.

MISS DORA. Sorry, Grace.

MISS GRACE. Will you have another cup?

MISS DORA. Please.

[*She is holding out her cup and MISS GRACE has poured from the teapot, when a Figure comes rushing through the French window. They both drop their hands and stare. MATT, panting and distressed, makes a sudden revealing gesture of appeal, and blots himself out behind a window curtain. The hue and cry is heard off. The two ladies are still staring in wild surprise, when the FARMER appears at the French window.*]

FARMER. Which way d' 'e go?

MISS DORA. Who?

FARMER. Convict. Mun cam' over your waal un' round the corner ther'.

MISS DORA. Oh! Yes. I thought I saw. Across the lawn, and over the wall at the far end, Mr. Browning. Quick!

[*Behind her the figure and face of MISS GRACE are expressive.*]

FARMER. Gude! Woi! Over the waal 'e went. To him, boys! Chop him before he'm into the spinney.

[*The hue and cry passes the window, running—the Two LABOURERS, the CONSTABLE, and Two TOURIST YOUTHS. The*]

cries die off and leave a charged silence—the TWO LADIES on their feet.

MATT. [*Emerging, still breathless, with his hat in his hand. Noting MISS DORA's riding kit, he turns to MISS GRACE*] Thank you, madam.

MISS GRACE. Not me.

MATT. [*Making a bow to MISS DORA*] That was great of you, great!

MISS DORA. Keep back—one of them might see.

[*She draws the curtains as MATT shrinks back.*]

MISS GRACE. Great! To tell such a lie! And for a convict!

MATT. [*Recovering his self-possession*] If you'll forgive my saying so, that makes it greater. To tell a lie for an archbishop wouldn't strain one a bit.

MISS GRACE. Please don't blaspheme.

MISS DORA. [*Pouring out tea*] Will you have a cup of tea, sir?

MISS GRACE. [*In a low voice*] Really, Dora!

MATT. [*Dropping his hat and taking the cup from MISS DORA*] It's too good of you. [*He drinks it straight off and hands it back.*] I'm most awfully sorry for butting in like this; but it was neck or nothing.

MISS GRACE. Then I think it should have been nothing, sir, considering the position you've placed my poor sister in.

MISS DORA. [*Hotly*] Poor sister! Grace, you——!

MATT. When you're hunted all you think of is the next move.

MISS DORA. I'm afraid you're awfully done.

MATT. Thanks, I'm getting my wind back. I feel like kissing the hem of your garment.

MISS DORA. It hasn't got one. Wasn't it rather mad to escape?

MATT. I don't think so. It's shown me how decent people can be.

MISS DORA. Did they ill-treat you?

MATT. Oh! no, the treatment's all right—a trifle monotonous.

MISS DORA. Listen! [*They listen. Faint shouting.*] Where are you making for?

MATT. No plan. They're no good. It's like a battle—you change 'em before you use 'em.

MISS DORA. I read who you were in the papers.

MATT. Oh! yes. I'm in big print? Thank you most awfully. I'll clear out now.

MISS DORA. No, wait! [*At the curtains.*] I'll be back in a minute. [*She slips out.*]

MISS GRACE. [*Turning round to him*] I suppose you call yourself a gentleman?

MATT. I really don't know. Depends on who I'm with. I might be contradicted.

MISS GRACE. You see the sort of woman my sister is—impulsive, humanitarian. I'm—I'm very fond of her.

MATT. Naturally. She's splendid.

MISS GRACE. If you don't want to involve her——

MISS DORA. [*Reappearing through the curtains*] I think I can hide you.

MISS GRACE. Dora!

MATT. No, no! It's not good enough. I can't let you——

MISS DORA. [*Turning on her sister*] I'm going to, Grace.

[*They speak together in rapid tones.*]

MISS GRACE. Not in this house.

MISS DORA. It's as much my house as yours. You need have nothing to do with it.

MISS GRACE. [*Drawing her from the window*] At least you haven't broken the law yet. And you're not going to now.

MISS DORA. I can't bear to see a soldier and a gentleman chased by a lot of chawbacons.

MISS GRACE. [*With a glance at MATT*] Dora, you mustn't. It's wrong and it's absurd.

MISS DORA. [*Heated*] Go upstairs. If I have to refer to you, I'll say you've seen nothing. And so can you.

MISS GRACE. [*Her voice rising*] You expect me to tell lies?

[MATT, unseen in the heat of this discussion, makes a motion of despair and slips out of the window.]

MISS DORA. I'm going to hide him, I tell you. Captain—
[Suddenly turning to MATT, she sees that he is no longer there.]
Where is he?

[The TWO SISTERS stand silent, blankly gazing about them.]

MISS DORA. Did he go by the door or the window?

MISS GRACE. I don't know.

MISS DORA. Didn't you see him?

MISS GRACE. I did not. [At the expression on her sister's face.] I say I did not.

[MISS DORA looks behind the window curtain, then cautiously out of the window, then recoils before the CONSTABLE, who comes in heated and breathless, followed by the FARMER and the FIRST LABOURER, who stops outside.]

CONSTABLE. Beg pardon, miss. We've lost un. He'm a fair twister. Maybe he doubled back. We'll 'ave a luke over, if an' in case he'm hidin' yere somewhere about. Can we go thru yere?

MISS DORA. He can't be in the house.

[MISS GRACE stands pursing her lips.]

FARMER. We med 'ave a luke, miss, after that. 'E'm a proper varmint.

[Without waiting for further permission, the two pass through the room and go out, Left. The TWO SISTERS stand looking at each other.]

MISS DORA. I won't have him caught!

[She moves towards the door.]

MISS GRACE. [Seizing her sister's skirt] Stop! I tell you!

MISS DORA. Let go!

MISS GRACE. I shall not. You're crazy. What is it to you?

MISS DORA. Let go, Grace!

MISS GRACE. You can't help him without breaking the law.

MISS DORA. Will you let me go, Grace? I shall hit you.

MISS GRACE. Very well. Hit me, then!

[The TWO SISTERS clinch, and for a moment it looks as if there

were to be a physical struggle between them. There are sounds of approach.

MISS DORA. Let go!

[*They unclinch, and wait for the door to open. Re-enter the FARMER and CONSTABLE.*]

FARMER. Well, he'm not yere; that's certain for zure.

CONSTABLE. [*Between the two*] You're quite sure, miss, yu saw 'im over that wall? [*A tense moment.*]

MISS DORA. Quite! [*MISS GRACE has drawn her breath in with a hiss.*]

FARMER. And not seen un since?

MISS DORA. No.

FARMER. Nor yu, miss? [*MISS DORA stares at her sister.*]

MISS GRACE. [*Throwing up her head, and with a face like a mask*] No.

FARMER. [*Picking up MATT's hat, left by him as he fled*] 'Ere, what's this?

MISS DORA. [*Recovering*] That? An old hat of my brother's that I use sometimes.

FARMER. 'Tis uncommon like the one that varmint was wearin'.

MISS DORA. Is it? Those fishing hats are all the same. [*Taking the hat.*] Have you tried the orchard, Mr. Browning?

FARMER. Ah! we mun try that, but 'tis gettin' powerful dimsy. Come, boys, we mun 'ave a gude old luke. The varmint fuled me bravely. I mun get me own back.

MISS DORA. Try the vicarage!

CONSTABLE. Ah! we'll try that tu.

[*They pass out at the window.*]

[*The Two Sisters are left silent. MISS GRACE suddenly sits down at the table and covers her face with her hand.*]

MISS DORA. You told it beautifully, Grace. Thank you!

MISS GRACE. [*Uncovering her face with a fierce gesture*] Thank me for telling a lie!

MISS DORA. I'm sorry.

MISS GRACE. Sorry? You'd make me do it again!

MISS DORA. [Simply] I would. [Looking after the hunt.]
Poor fellow! [On the look between them]

The curtain falls.

EPISODE IX

No time has passed. In the vestry of a village church lighted by an oil lamp, where, at the back, surplices and cassocks are hanging on pegs, a door, Right, leads to the churchyard and an open door, Left, into the church. There is no furniture except a chair or two, and a small table with a jug on it against the wall "up" from the door, Left.

[The stage is empty, but almost at once the PARSON enters from the church, carrying some overpast Harvest decorations, which he places on the table. He is a slim, grizzle-haired, brown, active, middle-aged man with a good, lined, clean-shaven face, and a black Norfolk jacket; obviously a little "High" in his doctrine. He pours water from a jug into two large vases, humming: "O for the wings—for the wings of a dove!" Then carrying the vases, one in each hand, he goes back into the church. The door on the Right is opened and the hunted, hatless MATT slips in, closing the door behind him. He stands taking in the situation, crosses to the open door opposite, spies the PARSON, and, recoiling, blots himself out behind a cassock. His face, peeping out, is withdrawn as the PARSON returns, this time literally singing: "O for the wings—for the wings of a dove!" Taking off his coat, he prepares to hang it on a peg and take a cassock, and as he reaches the highest note, he lifts the cassock from in front of MATT and starts back.

PARSON. Hullo!

MATT. Sanctuary, sir!

PARSON. What d'you mean? Who are you? [MATT opens his Burberry.] Oh! [That "Oh!" is something more than

astonishment; it has in it an accent of dismay, as if the speaker were confronted by his own soul.] The escaped convict! You oughtn't to have come in here.

MATT. Then where, sir? In old days the Church——

PARSON. In old days the Church was a thing apart; now it belongs to the State. [MATT makes a move towards the door.] Wait a minute! [He has hung up his coat and put on the cassock, as if to strengthen the priest within him.] I think I read that you were that Captain Denant who——

MATT. Yes.

PARSON. [Almost to himself] Poor fellow!

[MATT stares at him and there is a silence.

MATT. Death isn't as much to us who were in the war, as it is to you.

PARSON. I know; I was there.

MATT. Padre?

PARSON. [Nodding] Where have you come from?

MATT. House of the two ladies over there. Left them fighting over me. Couldn't stand that—not worth it.

PARSON. [With a little smile] Yes, Miss Dora wanted to keep you and Miss Grace to throw you out. H'm? And yet Miss Dora doesn't come to church, and Miss Grace does. Something wrong there; or is it something right? [He stares at MATT.] Are they after you?

MATT. Full cry.

PARSON. Sanctuary? If I were a Roman. Sometimes wish I were.

MATT. More logical.

PARSON. More powerful. This is a situation I've never had to face, Captain Denant.

MATT. Well, sir, I'm just about done. If you could let me rest a bit, that's all I ask.

PARSON. My dear fellow! Sit down! [He pulls a chair forward.] I'll lock the door. [He does so; then, as MATT looks at the window, which is in the fourth wall.] No, they can't see in. I expect you're very hungry too.

MATT. [*Sitting*] No, thanks—beyond it. You know that feeling, I bet?

PARSON. [*Shaking his head*] I'm afraid we of the Church lead too regular lives.

MATT. Not at the Front? It was pretty rife *there*.

PARSON. No, I'm ashamed to say—not even there.

[*While speaking, he is evidently pondering and torn.*]

MATT. [*Suddenly*] Well, Padre, how does it look to you? Giving me up?

PARSON. [*Moved*] Padre! [*He takes a turn and comes to a sudden halt in front of MATT's chair.*] As man to man—who am I to give you up? One poor fellow to another! [*Shaking his head.*] I can't help you to escape, but if you want rest, take it.

MATT. [*Suddenly*] Wonder what Christ would have done!

PARSON. [*Gravely*] That, Captain Denant, is the hardest question in the world. Nobody ever knows. You may answer this or that, but nobody ever knows. The more you read those writings, the more you realize that He was incalculable. You see—He was a genius! It makes it hard for us who try to follow Him. [*Gazing at MATT, who is sitting forward with his elbows on his knees and his head on his hands.*] Very tired?

MATT. Gosh! I didn't think one could feel so tired. My joints have gone on strike. I was a three-mile runner, too.

PARSON. Were you? Good man!

MATT. It's the strain here. [*Touching his head.*] If they get me and I have to go back! Odd! I didn't feel it half as much when I was escaping from Germany.

PARSON. Did anyone see you come in here?

MATT. Can't have—they'd have been in on my heels.

PARSON. Who's after you?

MATT. Villagers—and a constable.

PARSON. My villagers—and here am I——

MATT. [*Standing up*] By George, yes, Padre! It's too bad. I'll clear out.

PARSON. [*Putting his hand on his shoulder and pressing him back into the chair*] No, no! Rest while you can. You've

asked for sanctuary. I don't know that I've the right to turn you out of here. I don't know—anyway I can't. Take your time. I have a little brandy here. Sometimes we get a faint in church. [*He takes a bottle and a little glass from the corner cupboard.*] Drink it down.

MATT. [*Drinking it off. Pulling out the flask*] I say—I wonder if you'd return *this* for me; it's empty—to that name and address. [*He takes a tailor-sewn label out of his pocket.*] I ripped it off this Burberry. You might say "with unending gratitude." But please don't give that name away.

PARSON. No, no; I'll see to it. [*Pockets it.*] Tell me! What made you escape?

MATT. Stick a bob-cat in a cage and open the door by mistake; and see what happens. [*Looking at the PARSON's face.*] Oh! Yes, I know what you mean—but I've paid my scot long ago.

PARSON. Didn't you have a fair trial?

MATT. You can't "try" bad luck.

PARSON. All bad luck?

MATT. Well, I oughtn't to have hit him, of course; original sin, you know; but for an ordinary knock-out six weeks is about all you'd get; and I got four years more for that Rotten Row rail. Yes, I think I was perfectly entitled to have a shot.

PARSON. If you're quiet in your own mind—that's the only thing.

MATT. Well, you needn't worry, Padre. I shall be caught all right.

PARSON. [*With a smile*] I'm not worrying about that. Cæsar can look after himself, he has the habit. What bothers me is my own peace of mind. I don't like the thoughts that keep rising in it. You led a company in the war. And I lead——

MATT. Your parishioners—um?

PARSON. Yes. [*Nodding*] When you're gone—shall I be entitled to have been silent about you without telling *them* that I have been silent? Am I entitled to refrain from helping the

Law without letting *them* know it? If I let them know it, can I keep what little influence I now possess? And is it right for a parson to go on where he has no influence? That's my trouble, Captain Denant.

MATT. I see. [*With a start*] Someone's trying the door.

[*The PARSON moves to the door, Right; MATT has started forward.*

PARSON. [*At the door*] Who is that?

VOICE OF BELLRINGER. Me, zurr.

PARSON. No, Thomas, I'm busy; I can't let anyone into the church now till Service time. [*He stands listening, then returns, Centre.*] My bellringer.

MATT. [*In a low voice*] The hospitality of God—I shan't forget, Padre. But I don't want to be on your conscience. I'll flit. Wish I had the wings of that dove, though!

PARSON. I have Service at half-past six. There will only be one or two gathered together, I'm afraid. Make a third. You can rest through the Service. No one comes in here.

MATT. You're a trump! But I'd rather go and take my chance again. It's dark now. I don't like to give in. I'll bolt, and be caught in the open. You might give me your blessing.

PARSON. [*Shaking his head*] Not certain enough of myself—not certain enough. It takes a bishop at least to give a blessing.

[*A very loud knocking on the door.*

MATT. Trapped, by George!

[*He springs towards the cassocks and blots himself out.*

[*The PARSON has gone again to the door.*

PARSON. [*Rather sharply*] What is that?

VOICE OF CONSTABLE. Open the door, zurr, please!

PARSON. Who is it?

VOICE OF CONSTABLE. Constable, zurr; open, please.

[*The PARSON, with a gesture of distress, opens the door. Enter the CONSTABLE, the FARMER, the TWO LABOURERS, and the BELLRINGER.*

PARSON. I told you, Thomas, I could see no one till after Service.

BELLRINGER. Yes, zurr; but Constable 'e thought you ought to know as 'ow I zeed a man enter 'erc a while back.

[He looks round.]

PARSON. What's all this, Constable?

CONSTABLE. 'Tis th' escaped convict, zurr. We'm after 'e. These tu men yere found 'e down to the old gravel-pit. 'E give 'em the slip, an' we chased un to the ladies' 'ouse yonder, wherr 'e gave us the goo-by again; and Tammas says 'e saw a man come in 'ere as sounds praaperly like the varmint. You ben 'ere long, zurr?

PARSON. An hour, at least.

CONSTABLE. Front door's locked, but I got men in the porch. Be 'ee sure as there's no one in the church?

PARSON. *[Moving towards the church door]* I don't know whether you have the right to search a holy place; but look for yourselves, as quietly as you can, please. *[He stands at the church door to let them pass. They go, with the exception of the BELLRINGER, who has remained by the vestry door. The PARSON crosses to him.]* You can go too, Thomas. I'll stand here.

[The BELLRINGER, with uneasy eyes and motions, crosses under the compulsion of the PARSON's glance.]

PARSON. *[Hardly moving his lips]* Now, quick!

[But as he speaks, the FARMER reappears in the church doorway; the PARSON has just time to make a warning gesture, MATT just time to blot himself out again.]

PARSON. Well, Browning?

FARMER. 'Eem not therr; 'tes zo bare's me 'and. 'Eem a proper twisty customer for sure, but we'll get 'e yet.

[His eyes rest suspiciously on the PARSON's face.]

PARSON. *[With a forced smile]* He got away from you, then, did he?

FARMER. Aye! 'E can run an' twist like a rabbit. He'm a desperat foxy chap. What's behind they cassocks?

PARSON. *[Still with that forced smile]* I'll look, Browning.

[He moves to the cassocks, and, from the middle, takes a look behind them, but to the Left only. And at this moment they all return from the church and he turns to them.]

CONSTABLE. Thank 'ee, zurr; 'e'm not yere, Tammas. Yu made a fule of us zeemin'ly.

BELLRINGER. [*Stammering*] I zeed mun come in 'ere; I zeed mun wi' these eyes—I did zurely.

PARSON. [*Looking at his watch*] Service, Thomas. Go and ring the bell. [*To the CONSTABLE*] I'm afraid I must ask you to go too, please, unless you would all like to stay for Service.

[*A certain length of face becomes apparent.*]

CONSTABLE. [*Opening the door and beckoning the MEN out*] My juty, zurr, ef yu'll excuse us.

PARSON. That's all right, Constable.

FARMER. [*Suddenly*] Jest a minute, Vicar. Yu'll pardon me askin', but are yo zartun zure as yu'm not zeen this joker?

PARSON. [*Drawing himself up*] What is it you are asking me?

FARMER. I'm askin' yu on yure honour as a Christian gentleman, whether or no yu've zeen the escaped convict?

[*After a moment's intense silence.*]

PARSON. I——

MATT. [*Stepping out without the Burberry*] Certainly he's not. Sorry, sir, I was hidden there. [*Holding up his hands.*] I surrender, Constable.

FARMER. Woi! The varmint! Got un! Worry, worry, worry!

PARSON. Be quiet in this place; and go out—You shame God!

[*Astonished at this outburst, they slink out, leaving MATT, Centre, in the grip of the CONSTABLE. The PARSON is on his Left.*]

MATT. [*To the PARSON*] Forgive me, sir! Oughtn't to have come in here. It wasn't playing cricket.

PARSON. No, no! That you *have* done—that you *have* done.

MATT. It's one's decent *self* one can't escape.

PARSON. Ah! that's it! [*Very low*] God keep you!

[*He watches the CONSTABLE and MATT go out. The bell begins to ring, as*

The curtain falls.

THE ROOF

CAST OF THE ORIGINAL PRODUCTION, FIRST
PRODUCED BY MR. BASIL DEAN AT THE
VAUDEVILLE THEATRE, LONDON, ON TUES-
DAY, NOVEMBER 5, 1929

GUSTAVE . . .	<i>Mr. Horace Hodges</i>
THE HON. REGGIE FANNING	<i>Mr. Frank Lawton</i>
MAJOR MOULTENEY .	<i>Mr. Hesketh Pearson</i>
BAKER . . .	<i>Mr. David Horne</i>
BRICE . . .	<i>Mr. Eric Maturin</i>
MR. BEETON . .	<i>Mr. Ben Field</i>
MRS. BEETON . .	<i>Miss Hilda Sims</i>
HENRY LENNOX . .	<i>Mr. T. H. Roberts</i>
EVELYN LENNOX . .	<i>Miss Cicely Byrne</i>
DIANA . . .	<i>Miss Peggy Simpson</i>
BRYN . . .	<i>Miss Ann Casson</i>
A NURSE . . .	<i>Miss Lydia Sherwood</i>
A YOUNG MAN . .	<i>Mr. Eric Portman</i>
A YOUNG WOMAN .	<i>Miss Madeleine Carrol</i>
FROBA . . .	<i>Mr. D. A. Clarke-Smith</i>

TWO POMPIERS

SCENE I

GROUND FLOOR

Midnight

The dining-room of the little hotel, divided from a service-room, on the Left, by a partition, which ends some six feet from the foot-lights, and is screened on the dining-room side. The audience looks end-on at what passes in both rooms. The service-room has a sink and shelves (one over the other) for glasses, bottles, plates, spoons, etc., along the left wall forward, and a chair close to the opening. Owing to a curtain it is impossible to see what is at the back of this little room. The dining-room, which occupies the right hand and centre of the stage, has three small tables, set with white cloths, a glass or two, and salt-cellars, and one table (forward, Left Centre) set for a meal, at which a pretty, pleasant-faced NURSE in uniform is sitting half-way through a simple repast. There is a curtained window in the right wall, and the dining-room doorway is glass-screened from a corridor at the Back. The walls of the dining-room, as indeed of each room throughout the play, are of a pleasant pearl grey with panelling outlined in a deeper shade of the same. A clock points to midnight.

[When the curtain rises GUSTAVE, the waiter, a man of nearly sixty with an infinitely patient, lined, clean-shaven face, and a frequent faint smile, is laying tables. He moves to and from service-room to dining-room, setting two of the tables with cups and plates for next morning's café.

NURSE. *[Watching him]* Twelve o'clock! Don't you get awfully tired, Gustave?

GUSTAVE. *[Inclining his ear towards her, in a patient, caressing voice]* Ye-es, Mees, a lceetle tired; we 'ave no leeft, as you see.

NURSE. Well, I shan't want anything more now, thank you.

GUSTAVE. Tt-tt! [*Concerned*] A leetle fruit-rafraichi—veree cold. [*He goes across to the serving-room.*]

NURSE. No, really. You sit down and rest.

GUSTAVE. [*Wheeling*] Veree nice. I 'ave it ready. [*He brings it.*]

NURSE. Delicious cooking here.

GUSTAVE. [*Bridling*] We 'ave a pride, Mees.

NURSE. Are you left here all alone at night?

GUSTAVE. With the night porter, ye-es, Mees.

NURSE. What time do you generally finish?

GUSTAVE. Meednight. Gentlemen want drinks—a leetle supper some time.

NURSE. [*Looking at clock*] Another hour! I feel for you, Gustave. I know what feet are!

GUSTAVE. Feet, Mademoiselle—oh! là-là! 'Ow I would like to take my feet off some time! Le Bon Dieu created man with four feet—not fair on the two which always carry 'eem.

[*Sound of men's voices in the corridor. Three men—REGGIE FANNING, very young, BAKER and BRICE, getting on for forty, appear in the doorway. They all appear to have been revelling.*]

FANNING. I shall go up to the poor, poor Major.

BRICE. Up—up—up—up!

BAKER. Private life for me.

BRICE. We want cocktails, we want cocktails!

GUSTAVE. Three Martinis, Sare? Veree dry—veree cold.

BAKER. Four, Gustave. Right!

GUSTAVE. Ye-es, Sare.

[*He moves to prepare them at the table at the entrance of the service-room; the MEN disperse down the corridor, FANNING to the Left; the other two to the Right.*]

NURSE. That boy looks nice; pity he should go about like that.

GUSTAVE. In Paree, Mees, every one a leetle fresh.

NURSE. Yes, and why? You French are the steadiest people in the world.

GUSTAVE. [*Shaking cocktails*] Paree not France, Mees. In Paree good wine, good food. People come, they eat, they drink—suddenly their blood is surprised—it march.

NURSE. [*Smiling*] Excellent, Gustave; I believe you're perfectly right.

GUSTAVE. We 'ave a couple, numero douze—old people, verree comme il faut, verree sage. I watch them at dinner—at once they get red, their blood march.

NURSE. A Mr. and Mrs. Beeton—real stolid English. We English do seem stolid in Paris. Not my poor Mr. Lennox, though—he's very ill, Gustave.

GUSTAVE. Such a nice gentleman—'ave such a nice face. And 'is leetle girls, so charmeeng, très gentilles.

NURSE. I'm terribly sorry for Mrs. Lennox. I only hope they get back to England all right.

GUSTAVE. Poor ladee—she 'ave a look, always watching. [*Pouring out the cocktails.*] We 'ave a love couple, too—verree different—young mariés, or [*Tolerantly*] perhaps not.

NURSE. Perhaps not? Why?

GUSTAVE. Verree moch in love.

NURSE. [*Sighing*] It *can* go together, Gustave.

GUSTAVE. In Paree—not always, Mees. Sometime they come to see 'ow it work. Sometime they come for a little rest from being married.

NURSE. Are they English these two?

GUSTAVE. Ye-es, Mees, 'igh society, as you call eet.

BAKER. [*Appearing in doorway, followed by BRICE*] Gustave, where those cocktails? [*GUSTAVE carries them to him on a tray.*] Right! [*He drinks his off and hands one to BRICE, who tosses his off, too. Then carrying the other two cocktails, they go off upstairs rather noisily.*

[*Enter FROBA, a young violinist, with a Jugo-Slavian face, a lot of hair, and a somewhat hoarse, semi-Americanized voice.*

FROBA. Say, Waiter, I'm dry. Give me a long squashy lemon drink.

GUSTAVE. Ye-es, Mister Froba. [*Begins to squeeze lemons.*

FROBA. Say! Dose men are rader fresh. [*Seats himself at the table on the right in a line with the nurse.*] How's de sick gentleman, Nurse?

NURSE. He's not yet got over his journey from Nauheim.

FROBA. What's his trouble? Heart?

NURSE. Yes.

FROBA. Is dat so? Dey admire his books in Amurrica. He's kind of a big bug dere. [*The contrast between his speech and his rather spiritual face is intriguing.*]

NURSE. In spite of his being English?

FROBA. Why! Dey're crazy about antiques.

NURSE. I'm told his novels are delightful.

FROBA. Sure, dey are! He's got a soul, dat man. Say, Nurse—in a hundred human beings, how many have got souls?

NURSE. It's difficult to say. [*Smiling*] So many people keep their souls locked up.

FROBA. I get you; and take dem walks once a week, but not on Sundays.

NURSE. It's like the weekly bath of old days.

FROBA. Say, have you noticed dere's more baths, and more automobiles, and fewer souls in Amurrica dan anywheres?

NURSE. I've never been in America. But I expect the souls are in the bottom drawer all right.

FROBA. Well, I'm telling you—I've been in Amurrica ten years. Dey wash so much, and dey move around so; it dakes quite an occasion to make dem open de bottom drawer.

NURSE. A little soul goes a long way, Mr. Froba. Just as well to keep them for Bank Holidays.

FROBA. Well, when I play at my concerts, I look at all dose faces and if I see a soul it kind of goes to my head. I make quite a noise playing to it.

GUSTAVE. [*Bringing him the drink*] Veree long, Sare; verree cold.

FROBA. Gustave, you're a man and a broder, and you, sure, have a soul.

GUSTAVE. Ah! De soul. Each wine 'ave its bouquet.

FROBA. I must go now—practise for my concert.

[BRICE and FANNING enter, chanting as they come to the tune of "Old Man River":

"We want drinks, we want drinks,
We want 'em cold, we want 'em long—
Make no mistake, we want 'em strong—
And don't you get the mixing wrong—
We want drinks."

FANNING. [*Halting at sight of the NURSE*] We beg your pardon. [*To GUSTAVE*] Could you get us two whiskies and sodas?

GUSTAVE. Black and White, Sare—verree Scotch, verree strong.

FANNING. [*Weakly*] Ve'y Scotch, ve'y strong; Mr. Brice, that's a *mot* if you know what I mean.

GUSTAVE. [*Bringing bottle and syphon to table at the back, bottle in hand*] Say ven, Sare?

BRICE. Never say "when," never say "when"!

FANNING. [*To GUSTAVE*] I leave it to you to give me what you think is pup-proper.

GUSTAVE. [*Patiently to FANNING*] One fingarc, Sare?

[*A bell rings in the service-room.*

BRICE. Put it down. We'll fix it.

[*GUSTAVE marks with his eye the height of the whisky in the bottle and goes out to answer the bell.*

[*The two attend to the adjustment of their drinks.*

FROBA. I guess dey've lost de keys of *deir* bottom drawers.

NURSE. You never know, Mr. Froba. The soul has a way of coming out under pressure.

FROBA. Well, I judge *you* get a chance to see it pressed.

[*He turns to stare at the young man, who is looking, rather fascinated, at the back of the NURSE's head.*

FANNING. [*Half seas over*] I beg your pardon, Nurse, but could you take my temperachure? I feel so—so hot.

NURSE. [*Turning, startled*] I've no thermometer, here.

[*Looking at him steadily.*] But I can tell you exactly what you want. No more whisky and a good long sleep.

FANNING. [*Grave and considerate*] Oh! do you think so? Thank you ve'y much. As a matter of fact, I believe you're pup-perfectly right.

NURSE. [*Getting up*] I'm sure I am. Good-night. [*She goes. FROBA gets up too and follows her out.*]

[*GUSTAVE comes back and prepares a tray, with caviare, some bread, some olives, and a bottle of Château d'Yquem; and presently goes out with it.*]

FANNING. That was ve'y quick diag-diagnosis, Mister Brice. She's a ve'y nice woman, I should think. I like her face, and I like her voice.

BRICE. Ho, ho! Don't you try to get off with that nurse, young man.

FANNING. Mister Brice, you may think you are funny, but you are not.

BRICE. [*Whistling*] Keep it on! Keep it on, my lad!

FANNING. I am not your lad, and I thank God for it.

BRICE. I say! Don't get ratty!

FANNING. You seem to think that I have a low opinion of women, like your own.

BRICE. I should say you've got no opinion of women at all. Never seen one, have you—except your mother and your nurse?

FANNING. I shall be obliged if you will not be insulting.

BRICE. Well, then [*Grinning*], let's hear your adventures with women.

FANNING. No gentleman ever talks about his adventures with women.

BRICE. Not when he's had none.

FANNING. Mister Brice, please consider yourself a stranger to me.

BRICE. Look here, young man, d'you want some advice? You've been brought up at home, I'm told. You're just ten years below your proper age. When I was your age——

FANNING. I don't care a hoo-hoot what happened when you were my age.

BRICE. That's lucky, because I'm not going to tell you. But if you think that because you've been brought up with cotton-wool in your ears, you can criticize men of the world, you're ruddy well mistaken.

FANNING. [*Finishing his drink and staring at BRICE in a prolonged manner*] Mister Brice, I excuse you because you are drunk. [GUSTAVE *returns*.] I leave this gentleman, if he can be called a gentleman, in your cus-custody. I am going up.

BRICE. Up—up—up—up! [FANNING *looks at him with inebriated haughtiness and goes out*.] Young pup, pup, pup!

GUSTAVE. [*Quietly*] Excuse, Sarc. Not right to make so young gentlemen drunk.

BRICE. Heh! [*Staring*.] What—what the deuce are you butting in for?

GUSTAVE. No, Sarc. A nice young man—not a strong 'ead.

BRICE. Why didn't you refuse to serve him, then, eh?

GUSTAVE. Not my place to refuse, Sarc.

BRICE. Nor is it your place to tell me what I ought to do. Darned impudence, Waiter, darned impudence!

GUSTAVE. Ye-es, Sarc. But when gentlemen 'ave some drink on board, as you say—not careful. Onlee a boy—a peetee.

BRICE. Look here, my careful friend, are you suggesting that I'm d-drunk, myself?

GUSTAVE. Not yet, Sarc.

BRICE. Oh! not yet! Well, I'm damned!

GUSTAVE. No, Sarc, only a leetle fresh.

BRICE. [*Staring at him*] I shall darned well complain to your manager.

GUSTAVE. [*With his faint smile*] Manager 'ave gone for the night, Sarc. Onlee myself 'ere! To-morrow, not complain—cold feet, Sarc. Perhaps not remembre.

BRICE. Don't you bet on that! I've a dashed good memory. [*He finishes his drink and pours out some more whisky*.] Do they pay y' extra for givin' unpleasant advice in this establishment?

GUSTAVE. [*Deprecating*] Veree sorree, Sare—'ave no weesh to offend you.

BRICE. Well, you have. You French think you're everybody, and I—I don't give a kick for the lot of you.

GUSTAVE. [*Ironically*] We are desolate, Monsieur.

[*A bell rings and he looks at the board.*]

BRICE. You will be when I've done with you. [*Returning to his first grievance.*] Silly young cuckoo! I'm not his keeper.

GUSTAVE. No, Sare, the Major 'is keeper—veree nice man—veree quiet.

BRICE. Meaning I'm neither. H'm! Didn't you hear that bell?

GUSTAVE. Ye-es, Sare—just attending to see if you 'ave feenished with me.

BRICE. [*Grinning*] Finished with you? Not I. Not by a long chalk. You wait and see.

GUSTAVE. [*With his faint smile*] Yes, Sare, the bull-dogue 'e 'old on.

BRICE. You bet he does. You've got your trouble comin' to you, my friend.

GUSTAVE. Excuse, Sare. I go now. [*He goes to answer the bell.*]

[*BRICE, left alone, glances after him, and finishes his whisky.*]

BRICE. Old dotard! [*A slow grin spreads over his face.*] I'll make him sit up, up, up!

[*The NURSE enters busily and goes towards the service-room, where she looks for something on the shelves. BRICE gets up and goes to the entrance of the service-room.*]

BRICE. Are you looking for anything? Can I h-help you loo-look?

NURSE. No, thanks; I just want some cold-consommé. Oh! there it is! [*Takes down a basin of consommé from the top shelf and begins to prepare a little tray with a cup of it, biscuits, etc.*]

BRICE. That old waiter is an of-offensive ass.

NURSE. Oh! Do you think so? I think he's a dear. What makes you say he's offensive?

BRICE. Because he gives advice. He's not my grea—great—

grandmother. [*Laughs inanely.*] All people are offensive when they give advice. Don't you agree with me?

NURSE. It depends on the people, and the advice.

BRICE. I—I don't say I wouldn't take advice from the Archbishop of Canterbury. But—a waiter! I mean to say—What!

NURSE. Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings——

BRICE. Babes and sucklings! I'm not fond of babes and sucklings. [*Laughs.*] I don't mind telling you, Nurse, I'm going to give that old waiter a jolly good jolt.

NURSE. [*Coming out with tray, which she deposits on table*] Don't you think you'd better sleep on it?

[*BRICE has stepped into the service-room and stands looking at the back of it.*

BRICE. Not on your life! I've just had an i-idea.

NURSE. [*Sharply*] I should keep it, and have it stuffed.

[*BRICE suddenly utters a crow.*

NURSE. [*Startled*] Is anything the matter with you?

BRICE. [*Turning to her*] Take it from me, it's a magnificent idea. [*Laughs.*

NURSE. Really! I've known so many magnificent ideas asking for soda-water the next morning. [*She takes up the tray.*

[*BRICE follows her, and as she disappears shouts at the top of his voice: "We want cocktails, we want cocktails," then suddenly covers his lips, saying: "H'ssh!" laughs inanely and goes back to the service-room, where he disappears in its back recesses.*

[*While he is engaged there in whatever he is engaged in, the faint sounds of a violin playing a tango steal into the hush. After about a minute BRICE comes back into the open, snapping his fingers and drunkenly pleased with himself.*

BRICE. That's all right——! I've got back on the old swine. That'll shake 'im up. That'll give him the twice over. Ha, ha, ha! [*He goes to his table and pours himself out some more whisky.*

[*GUSTAVE re-enters.*

BRICE. Oh! here you are again! Just in time.

GUSTAVE. Ye-es, Sare.

BRICE. Ha, ha, ha! Ha, ha, ha! Ha, ha, ha!

GUSTAVE. Excuse, Sare?

[But BRICE continues to laugh, and goes out. He can be heard calling inanely, "Up—up—up—up," as he mounts the stairs.]

GUSTAVE. [Measuring the whisky, which is nearly gone] Oh! Là! Quel sale type! [He sits down on the chair by the service-room.] Mon Dieu! Que j' suis fatigué! [He sits there with his head on his hands, when suddenly he raises his nose and sniffs.] Que qu'il y a? [He starts up.] Cré nom de Dieu! Qu'y a-t-il! [He dashes into the service-room.] Oh! Là, là!

[Returning into the dining-room and running to the Entry: "Pierre! Pierre! Vite! Vite! Allez chercher les——!"]

The curtain falls.

SCENE II

FIRST FLOOR

The same evening: Midnight.

The Lounge of the little hotel, occupying the whole of the stage. Chairs, settees, and a card-table. The window, uncurtained on the Right, looks out on to a little French Square. A wide doorway Back, with curtains looped, to the stairway. A clock points to twelve.

[MAJOR MOULTENEY, a shrewd quiet man of fifty, in dinner jacket, is sitting in an arm-chair finishing a cigar and looking at a copy of "*La Vie Parisienne*."] "

MOULTENEY. [Yawning] Oh-h! Twelve o' clock! Darn it! [Cheerful sounds are heard.] That sounds like him.

[Young FANNING appears.]

MOULTENEY. [Looking up] Hallo, Reggie! Where are your boon companions?

FANNING. [Making a motion as if hitting a ball with a racquet] Coming up—up—up—very boon, Major. [Halting at "*La Vie Parisienne*."] *La Vie Parisienne!* Major! That

is not a pup-proper pup-periodical. [*He takes it from the MAJOR's hands. The MAJOR grins up at him.*]

MOULTENEY. Strikes me, young man, you've been wetting your whistle.

FANNING. Not enough to matter, Major. Whenever I was tempted I thought of you sitting here, and I said to myself—must set an example to the Major. Besides, Mr. Baker's going to teach me poker.

MOULTENEY. He can teach you, but he's not going to play with you.

FANNING. Why not?

MOULTENEY. My dear boy, poker's an art—you don't learn it in an evening.

FANNING. But he says it's so simple. He's a very good egg, Major.

MOULTENEY. [*Dryly*] I've no doubt.

FANNING. Brice, his friend, is not quite such a good egg, in my opinion. [*Sounds of revelry below.*]

MOULTENEY. They're noisy beggars, anyway.

FANNING. Noisy but nice, Major. [*Dropping "La Vie Parisienne" and moving towards the doorway as the figure of a YOUNG MAN in evening dress with a hat and an overcoat over his arm appears in it.*] Hallo!

YOUNG MAN. [*After a moment's hesitation and a jerky movement as if to cover his face with his hat*] Hallo, Fanning! You staying here?

FANNING. Yes, I'm staying here; are you?

YOUNG MAN. Perching—off to-morrow. What's brought you to Paris?

FANNING. Oh! only getting ready for the jolly old Guards.

YOUNG MAN. Oh! yes, you're going into the Guards? Um!

FANNING. Round the world first—aren't we, Major? Going to shoot big game. This is my m-mentor, Major Moulteney. [*Turns to the MAJOR.*] Major, this is—

YOUNG MAN. How d'you do? Sorry, I've got to go. Good-night! [*He slips away abruptly.*]

FANNING. That was Tony—[*Waving his hands slightly.*] Can't remember his other name! Met him in a country house. Have you noticed, Major, how people leave their surnames about in country houses. But I remember his profession, he's a polo-playing poet.

MOULTENEY. H'm! That sounds a new form of trouble.

FANNING. He plays a very good game; and his poetry's remarkable—I haven't read it. I say—poetry, polo, poker! Sounds like the whole duty of man. Why don't you teach me poker yourself, Major?

MOULTENEY. Not in my contract, Reggie. Your mother'd have a fit.

FANNING. Oh! Mother. She throws a fit if I blow my old nose. You know, the extraordinary thing is, Major, somebody told me—my mother was wild in her youth.

MOULTENEY. Lady Ilfracombe! [*Shakes his head.*] Not wild, Reggie—no—merely unmanageable.

[*With sounds of revelry BAKER and BRICE appear arm-in-arm in the doorway. Each holds a cocktail in the off hand.*]

FANNING. Hallo! Here they are, booner than ever, Major.

BAKER. Reggie, cocktail for you. [*Hands cocktail.*] Major, cocktail for you. [*BRICE hands the MAJOR a cocktail.*] Right! The old waiter makes 'em well. He's a character.

FANNING. Mr. Baker, you were going to teach me poker.

BAKER. Right! Brice? Got some cards?

BRICE. What d'you take me for—a conjuror? [*Produces a pack from his pocket.*] So I am. Splendid!

BAKER. [*Taking them*] Right! [*He sits at the card-table.*] Now, what games do you know, young man? Old Maid? Beggar-my-Neighbour? Patience?

FANNING. [*With difficulty*] No, I only know Bridge.

BAKER. Well, in poker the great thing is to have a cooler head than the other fellows.

FANNING. I don't know if I have this evening.

BRICE. Hear, hear! [*He and FANNING are standing by the table; the MAJOR gets up too, to watch.*]

BAKER. And a face you can take off. See! [*His face becomes mask-like with a slightly japing look, then returns to normal.*] Right!

FANNING. That's very interesting!

BAKER. That's for the bluff! When you've bluffed, remember to look as if you hadn't. And when you haven't bluffed, to look as if you had! See?

FANNING. That's terribly interesting. I—I'll practise in a looking-glass. I'll certainly practise in a loo—looking glass.

BAKER. Right! Now for the double cross. *Attention!*

[*But FANNING, who has drunk his cocktail, has a vacant air.*]

FANNING. What—what double cross.

BAKER. You're goin' to see. Watch my face!

FANNING. If you'll excuse me, I'd rather not. I'm so thirsty. Could I have a real drink?

BRICE. [*Linking his arm*] We want drinks, we want drinks!

[*He and FANNING go out, chanting to the tune of "Old Man River."*]

BAKER. Major, that young man is a proposition—greener than I ever thought to see a boy again.

MOULTENEY. He's never been away from home—neither school, nor college. Got a mother.

BAKER. Ho! Great mistake, mothers!

MOULTENEY. Great mistake, *his* mother.

BAKER. Well, the French all have mothers, and the boys live at home, but they don't stay green like that. What you going to do about it?

MOULTENEY. [*Shaking his head*] Don't know. Keep him *integer vitæ* if I can.

BAKER. *Scelerisque purus?* What! He wanted to get off to-night. Saw a girl for the first time.

MOULTENEY. Thanks for stopping him. He's not at all a bad boy—just an un-blooded pup, that's all.

BAKER. What's your scheme?

MOULTENEY. Get him down to Africa.

BAKER. Shooting and so on. Right!

MOULTENEY. I made a mistake to stop in Paris. I hate Paris, anyway.

BAKER. Take my tip! Let him get properly drunk, Major.

[GUSTAVE, *who is seen without on his way upstairs, pauses.*

GUSTAVE. [*In entrance, thinking himself addressed*] Sare?

BAKER. Not you, Gustave.

GUSTAVE. No, Sare. [*He passes on.*

MOULTENEY. [*With a smile*] Drunk? Why?

BAKER. Next morning. Remember your first drunk? Pleasant?

MOULTENEY. Horrid!

BAKER. First woman—that's different. First gamble—all depends. But first drunk's a cert.

MOULTENEY. The real trouble is that he plays no games.

BAKER. Ah! A boy's got to play games, or he'll take it out in "life." Funny word "life," Major.

MOULTENEY. Very. In the big sense very fine.

BAKER. Right! Hated bein' in the war, but never regretted it since, and never want it again.

MOULTENEY. No, by George.

BAKER. Once find out that you can stand fire, and you don't want any more fire. What! [*Getting up.*] First-rate cooking here, Major. Funny little hole—very French.

[FANNING *appears ornamentally inebriated.*

BAKER. [*Sotto voce*] Drunk! Right!

MOULTENEY. Reggie, bed for us, I think.

FANNING. [*Cheerful and exhilarated*] Bed! That's just what the nurse said, Major. I asked her to take my temperachure, and she said—she nevah took strange temperachures. At least she practically said that, because she's a nice woman. Mr. Brice and I have had a row about her. I was obliged to leave him in charge of the old waiter. Have you notished the old waiter—he's an early Victorian. Shall we ask him for some nishe drinks? [*Laughs.*]

MOULTENEY. No more drinks for you, Reggie.

FANNING. No more drinks? Why? What did we come to

Parish for? We haven't even danced. Mister Baker, will you give me the pleasure of a dansh?

MOULTENEY. Sit down, Reggie, and don't play the fool.

FANNING. [*Sitting down and contemplating the MAJOR anxiously*] Major, do you sus-suspect me? Mister Baker, how many drinks did we have?

BAKER. Three, I guess.

FANNING. And two makes five. And six—the one I want.

MOULTENEY. And won't get.

FANNING. [*Solemnly*] Major, you and Mister Baker have both been drunk many times.

BAKER. We have—have we, Major?

FANNING. Ve'y well. I never have, so that even if I'm drunk now, I'm shtill a lot of holes down.

MOULTENEY. Neither Mr. Baker nor myself are proud of having been drunk.

BAKER. Not too fearfully.

FANNING. I should like to argue that point, Major. I feel that if you had never been drunk, you wouldn't know what it felt like, and that would be a losh to you. You wouldn't be the men you are, would you?

MOULTENEY. Which way are we to take that, Baker?

FANNING. Major, isn't the duty of a man to be a man, a whole man, and nothing but a man? But are you nothing but a man if you've never been drunk? Excuse my logic.

MOULTENEY. All puppies eat muck, till they learn better.

FANNING. [*Triumphantly*] Eggsactly! I'm quite 'ware of being a pup-puppy. [*Very earnestly.*] But I want to say that—[*Wanders*] er—er—oh! I know. [*Smiles blandly.*] Mister Baker, I was brought up ve'y strictly and I want to tell you about it.

BAKER. [*Interested*] Right!

FANNING. I think it may be a lesson to the Major.

MOULTENEY. Oh! you do?

FANNING. Yes. [*Earnestly.*] You see, I've got an inferirority complexsh—if y'know what I mean.

MOULTENEY. Don't be an ass, Reggie.

FANNING. Not at all! I feel I have to wipe out my mothersh apron-shtrings.

BAKER. Very natural!

FANNING. [*Gratefully*] Thank you! Don't misunderstand me—I'm not saying anything against my mother. She's a wonderful woman, Mister Baker—full of good works. I—I'm one of her good works.

[*He smiles pleasantly and goes into a sort of dream.*

BAKER. [*Aside*] He's O.K., Major.

FANNING. [*Coming out of his dream*] Not at all! That's where you make a mistake. Who knows whether I'm O.K.?

[*Again goes into his dream.*

BAKER. [*Aside to the MAJOR*] Not as drunk as we thought.

[*MOULTENEY nods.*

FANNING. Who knows—if I don't know; an' what I mean to say is: How am I to know? I've always been so beautifully looked after. Nothing's ever happened to me.

BAKER. [*Sotto voce*] Kid's right.

MOULTENEY. That'll cure itself fast enough, Reggie.

FANNING. [*Shaking his head solemnly*] No, not fast enough—if you'll excuse me—lots of arrears to make up. I d-don't know even whether I'm a cak-coward.

MOULTENEY. Of course you're not.

FANNING. [*Blandly*] Why do you say that?

MOULTENEY. No decently bred chap is.

FANNING. Excuse me, Major, tha's not logic, it's an assumption. I don't know if I can take my liquor like a—a sportsman.

BAKER. That's a matter of practice.

[*Shout from below: "We want cocktails, we want cocktails!" is heard.*

FANNING. Mister Baker, you're ve'y sympathetic. But I—I don't even know whether I can lose my money pup-properly.

BAKER. Can you stick to it properly?

FANNING. Excuse me, that isn't part of the education of a

sportsman. Then again: I don't know whether I can make love, if you'll forgive my mentioning such a thing.

MOULTENEY. You'll know as soon as ever you need.

FANNING. There speaks my mother. That is my difficulty, Major, if you don't mind my saying so. My mother is always speaking. [Enter GUSTAVE.

GUSTAVE. You want cocktails, Sare!

MOULTENEY. I don't.

FANNING. Mushtn't dishappoint him. He—he might die of disappointment.

MOULTENEY. Stop it, Reggie—you've had too much. [To GUSTAVE] No, thanks.

GUSTAVE. No, Sare. [He goes.

FANNING. You see, Major, it isn't so much that I want to be a bad lad, as that I want to know what sort of bad lad I should be.

MOULTENEY. I quite see, old man.

FANNING. I thought you would; I have a great respect for you, Major.

MOULTENEY. [Grinning] When you're squiffy.

FANNING. No, no—not—not only then. Sometimes I have a great respect for you when I'm sober. But sometimes I think you are too conshi-onshi-enshi-us, if you follow me.

MOULTENEY. Quite, Reggie!

FANNING. [Taking the MAJOR's hand] Thank you ve'y much, Major. You see, I've got to become a *m-man*, if you know what I mean.

BAKER. That's settled.

[BRICE appears from the stairs; his hair is standing up; he looks rather drunk, and professionally funny, as if he had done something clever. He begins at once to chant: "We want beds! we want beds!" in which chant FANNING automatically joins.

MOULTENEY. Shut up, Reggie, you'll wake people. If there's a nurse here, there must be somebody ill.

FANNING. [Stopping] Oh! I never thought of that—how ve'y inconstiderate of me!

BRICE. We want——

BAKER. [*To BRICE*] Dry up!

BRICE. That old waiter's goin' to get surprise of his life.

[*He laughs inanely.*]

FANNING. [*Seriously to the MAJOR*] Do you think I ought to go an' apologize to the nurse, Major?

BRICE. [*Crowing*] Young r-rip!

BAKER. Chuck it, Brice!

FANNING. Mister Brice, I am sorry to say that I cannot consider you a proper person to associate with the Major.

BRICE. You young pup!

MOULTENEY. Kennel up, Reggie! You've had too much and you know it.

FANNING. [*With dignity*] In that case will you excuse me if I blood Mister Brice's nose?

BRICE. [*Laughing and squaring up*] Try it, my boy! Try it!

[*As he speaks, GUSTAVE appears between the curtains, his figure is distraught and his hands are raised.*]

GUSTAVE. Messieurs! Ze 'ouse burn!

MOULTENEY. What!

GUSTAVE. I send de porter to call de engines.

MOULTENEY. [*Sharply*] What's that?

GUSTAVE. Fire! Beeg fire! It spread! It catch de stair.

MOULTENEY. Where? How?

[*BRICE turns suddenly to GUSTAVE, who is staring at him. His mouth falls open, he makes a gesture of dazed appeal.*]

GUSTAVE. [*Responding to that appeal*] I not know, Sare. Come queeck!

[*He goes out, followed by the MAJOR. BRICE subsides into a chair.*]

BAKER. Here! Get up, Brice! Young Fanning, pull yourself together!

[*The MAJOR's voice is heard shouting up the stairs.*]

MAJOR. Baker! Baker! Telephone for the engines. Sharp!

BAKER. Right! [*He goes to the telephone and rapidly calls up the fire-station*] Caserne d'incendie, caserne—de pompiers. Si! Il y a incendie. Si, si! Vite! Il paraît que c'est grave.

[*The MAJOR's voice*: "Water, you fellows! It's caught the stairs!" FANNING *seizes a bottle of water on a table, then puts it down.*

FANNING. That's no good.

BAKER. [*Who has finished telephoning*] Come on, boys, bathroom, cans.

[*He runs out.* FANNING, *with a visible effort, pulls himself together, and follows.* There is a sound of metal clanging, of water swishing. BRICE *jumps up and runs out with the hoarse cry*: "We want water!"

[*The stage is empty, and suddenly the light goes out; figures pass dimly in the corridor with cans.* The MAJOR's voice is heard.

MAJOR. Steady, Reggie! Good man! That's the stuff! Baker, pull down those curtains!

BAKER. [*Appearing, dim, in the doorway*] Right!

[*He pulls the curtains down.*

MOULTENEY. [*Appearing in the dim light*] It's burning like hell. We'll try and stop it here. Make a line—pass the cans. You, waiter, go and rouse people, send 'em on the roof! Stand by, Reggie! Good man! Now, line along!

FANNING. I say, Mr. Baker, it's—it's providential, isn't it?

BAKER. Right! Now's the time to show your mettle.

FANNING. Rather!

The curtain falls.

SCENE III

SECOND FLOOR

The same evening: Midnight

A bedroom with bathroom carved out of it on the Left, and a door below the bathroom into a visible corridor. A bedroom, momentarily filled, as one may say, by the lively forms of two GIRLS of thirteen and twelve, in pyjamas, pillow-fighting.

[*As the curtain rises the skirmish ceases, and the eldest, DIANA, takes a flying leap on to her bed and plumps down cross-legged.*

DIANA. Pax, Bryn.

BRYN. Pig! You've pulled out three hairs. Look!

[Holds them out.]

DIANA. We can stick them in again. Mum's got some seccotine. [Giggles.] Have you wound your watch?

BRYN. No. [Putting it to her ear.] It's stopped, Di.

DIANA. Put it to twelve. It's striking! Hallo! Listen! Open the door, Bryn. [BRYN opens the door. The sound of a violin playing a Leclair Tambourin comes in.] [Under her breath] I say! Isn't it topping? [Both listen with all their ears. The player reaches the end, and there is silence.]

BRYN. Shall I go up and ask if he'd like us in to hear him. They love audiences, you know. It's all rot when they pretend they don't.

DIANA. You can't in pys.

BRYN. Why not?

DIANA. [Flying up and grabbing her] We don't know him.

BRYN. He wouldn't mind, Di.

DIANA. No, Bryn, you can't. Besides, I bet he doesn't wash his head.

BRYN. [Wide-eyed] Really?

DIANA. Musicians don't.

BRYN. How d'you know?

DIANA. It takes the gloss off. That one at Nauheim never washed—I simply know he didn't.

BRYN. This one washes his ears anyway.

DIANA. He hasn't got any.

BRYN. I saw part of one.

DIANA. Nobody could see through all that hair. You do tell whackers, Bryn.

BRYN. [Looking out of the door] Here he is, Di, coming down. I dare you to ask him if he washes his head.

DIANA. Bryn—if you——!

BRYN. [To FROBA passing in the corridor] Oh! Do come in, my sister wants to ask you something.

DIANA. [Under her breath] You little toad!

FROBA. [*Moving into the doorway*] Ye-es? What is it?

DIANA. [*Recoiling*] Oh! Do you like Paris?

FROBA. Well! I judge it's some town.

DIANA. Yes, we judge that, too.

FROBA. I guess quite some people do. You're a bit in the bud to see life in Paris. What have you seen anyway?

DIANA. Oh! the Louvre, you know, and Notre Dame.

BRYN. And the Madeleine.

FROBA. Heu! You are go-getters.

BRYN. What is a go-getter?

FROBA. Kind of an early bird—go gets the worm.

BRYN. [*Coldly*] We don't like worms.

FROBA. In Paris the worms are extra-special. Is that all you want to ask me?

DIANA. Y-yes. Thank you!

FROBA. Heu! Den I'll go get my drink. Say, you look cunning in dose pajamas.

[*The children make faces as he goes out and away down the corridor.*]

BRYN. [*Shutting the door*] You are a funk, Di. [*Going across to the window.*] You see he was quite used to pyjamas. What can we do now?

DIANA. Yes, I'm not a bit sleepy.

BRYN. I've got a hunch. Those two old things next door—let's tap like the prisoners in Dad's novel—the one we're not allowed to read.

DIANA. Now, that's what I call sensible. They're stuffy old things.

BRYN. We must do it properly, Di. You say over the alphabet and I'll do the tapping. [*They crouch on the beds against the wall.*] What shall I tap with?

DIANA. I'll get the odol bottle. [*Gets it from the bathroom.*]

BRYN. They always ask each other's names first.

DIANA. Yes, but we know theirs—it's Beeton.

BRYN. Let's start with S.O.S. then.

DIANA. It's an awful strain getting the alphabet right every

time. Ready? [*As she says the alphabet over to S, BRYN taps.*] Stop! Now for O. [*Says alphabet to O. BRYN taps once too often.*]

BRYN. Oh! Di! I over-tapped. They've got P.

DIANA. Well, what begins with S.P.?

BRYN. Spot! Sport! Spillikins.

DIANA. I know, Starting Price. Only that doesn't seem to lead to anything. We'll have to begin again. Let's try: Are you there? A. [*BRYN taps once.*] Now R. [*Begins alphabet to which BRYN taps when a resounding knock on the wall breaks them off. They giggle.*] It sounds as if they didn't like it.

BRYN. I don't expect they were ever in prison. They don't look sports. Shall we try again?

DIANA. It's too risky.

BRYN. Well, we must do something.

DIANA. I tell you what. There are some honeyspooners in the room opposite.

BRYN. How d'you know they're honeyspooners?

DIANA. I watched them at dinner. Their eyes were all swimmy. Disgusting! We might give them a lesson. They're only French.

BRYN. They aren't, if you mean the girl with all that neck.

DIANA. Well! They were speaking French with an awful lot of accent.

BRYN. Only showing off. I heard the man say "damn" in the hall.

DIANA. [*Doubtfully*] Oh! That makes a difference. They might cut up rusty.

BRYN. Well, let's only put on hats and coats and run in as if we thought it was our room.

DIANA. Yes, that's quite natural.

BRYN. Only—the door'll be locked, Di.

DIANA. It mightn't be, yet.

BRYN. Honeyspooners always lock their doors the first minute.

DIANA. How d'you know?

BRYN. Because the moment they get in, he says: "Darling!" and she says: "Oh! James!" and then they begin to kiss. B-beu!

DIANA. Bryn, you're awful!

BRYN. I know! Let's stand outside their door and miaow.

DIANA. That's a scheme!

BRYN. *You* do it, Di. And I'll watch you when they come out.

DIANA. You are a worm.

BRYN. Well, bag's last!

DIANA. We'd better rehearse. You spit best—you do the spitting. [*They rehearse softly.*] Safety first! If we put this screen outside their door we can get back before they see us.

BRYN. All right! [*They go out on tiptoe.*]

DIANA. [*Outside in the lighted corridor*] Begin low, Bryn, and rather rallentando, then we'll work up. Now!

[*The sound of their caterwauling rises, swells a little, and then suddenly with a scuttle they are back. A moment later MRS. LENNOX appears in the corridor and enters their room. She is a lady of about thirty-five, pale, pretty and anxious-looking.*]

BRYN. [*With innocent wide eyes*] Oh! is that you, Mum?

MRS. L. What were you doing?

BRYN. Just practising cats.

MRS. L. Did you put that screen out there?

DIANA. We thought you wouldn't like us to be seen, Mum.

MRS. L. Di! you really ought to know better.

DIANA. Why, Mum? It's very harmless.

MRS. L. Out of your room, when you should be in bed, and asleep.

DIANA. Well, Mum—this is Paris.

BRYN. Just seeing "life," you know.

MRS. L. Monkeys! [*Seeing pillows tossed about.*] Have you been pillow-fighting?

DIANA. Only softening them, Mum. Feel! They're awfully hard.

MRS. L. It'll be a relief to get you home.

BRYN. Are we going to-morrow?

MRS. L. If Father's well enough to travel. What's this odol doing here?

BRYN. What is it doing there, Di?

DIANA. Oh! It just strayed in.

MRS. L. Go and get that screen back.

[*The children go out and bring back the screen.* MRS. LENNOX tidies their beds.]

DIANA. Listen!

BRYN. [*At the window*] Doesn't he play beautifully?

[*She leans against the drawn-back curtain, at first feigning reverence, then genuinely moved. The violinist is playing Poise's "Le Foli Gilles."*]

MRS. L. [*Not to be put off—to DIANA*] You girls are altogether too young for your age.

DIANA. Well, Mum! We've got to be old some day. It's no use beginning before we need.

MRS. L. It's time *you* were getting serious, Di.

DIANA. Oh! no, not yet, Mum. *You* never have any fun. No one seems to have any fun after they're grown-up.

MRS. L. All right, duckie. Keep your fun as long as you can.

DIANA. Yes, that's what I thought. Dad's kept some, hasn't he?

MRS. L. Yes, you both take more after him than after me.

DIANA. Girls do. And boys take after their mothers. Dad's got a little joke inside that you couldn't put out, could you? He bubbles. [MRS. LENNOX *cannot answer.*] You don't want to put it out, do you?

MRS. L. Heavens! No, child.

BRYN. Mum! I suppose all the people in this hotel have come to see "life," haven't they? Why is there more "life" in Paris than in other places?

MRS. L. It's a superstition, Bryn.

BRYN. And what is "life" anyway?

MRS. L. A very ugly thing.

BRYN. Really?

DIANA. I know what it is—cocktails and dancing, and that.

BRYN. That tune gave me a funny feeling—here. [*She puts her hand on the middle of her waist.*] It squeezed me.

DIANA. Don't be soppy, Bryn. Besides, your heart isn't there, it's higher, to the left.

BRYN. Mum, it's in your middle, isn't it?

MRS. L. Anatomically—yes.

DIANA. Not in the tummy, Mum.

BRYN. It isn't my tummy. It's higher, in the diaphragm.

MRS. L. Diaphragm, Bryn.

BRYN. Tell us more about "life," Mum.

MRS. L. "Life," as they call it, has nothing to do with the heart, anyway.

BRYN. What has it to do with, then?

MRS. L. The appetites. And it's the shortest way to destroy them.

DIANA. Does Dad say that, too? Or would he only just say it to *us* for fear that we might want to "see life."

BRYN. But *can* you have too much dancing, Mum?

MRS. L. Of this modern dancing, much too much.

BRYN. Was ancient dancing more virtuous?

DIANA. I bet it wasn't. Dad says human nature doesn't change.

BRYN. When you used to dance, Mum, did it destroy your appetite?

MRS. L. [*Laughing*] No, increased it.

DIANA. There you are, then!

MRS. L. You don't understand, darlings.

DIANA. But, Mum—you haven't seen any "life," have you?

MRS. L. Not in that sense, perhaps. But you can take it from me that it's silly, all the same.

BRYN. [*With a deep sigh*] I think it's so sad having to take things from other people.

MRS. L. Now, darlings, you really must go to bed. I'll tuck you up.

BRYN. [*With suspicious readiness*] All right, Mum, we were waiting up for that. Come on, Di!

[*They race into bed. MRS. LENNOX tucks up and kisses first one and then the other.*]

MRS. L. Now be good, won't you?

BOTH. Oh! rather!

[*MRS. LENNOX, with a look back, goes out, switching off the light; as she opens the door the cry "We want cocktails" from below comes in.*]

BRYN. [*In the dark*] Di, I'm jolly thirsty.

DIANA. So'm I. Let's ring! The bell's over you—three times for the waiter. [BRYN rings emphatically.]

DIANA. We'd better put our undies away. He's very old.

Turn up.

[BRYN turns the light up. They both scramble out of bed and tidy away their undies. They have barely got back to bed when GUSTAVE is seen in the corridor, and there is a knock.]

DIANA. Entrez! [GUSTAVE appears.]

GUSTAVE. Ye-es, Mees?

BRYN. Oh! Gustave, we're so thirsty. Could you bring us some ginger-ale?

GUSTAVE. Ye-es, Mees. I bring it—veree sweet, verree cool.

DIANA. Are you always busy, Gustave?

GUSTAVE. 'Ave some gentlemen down there, Mees.

DIANA. Yes, we heard them calling for cocktails. I suppose they're seeing "life"?

GUSTAVE. Ye-es, Mees—a leetle life—verree nice.

DIANA. I suppose we couldn't have a little "life" up here, could we, Gustave?

GUSTAVE. [*Interrogating*] Excuse, Mees—life?

BRYN. She means cocktails.

GUSTAVE. [*With his smile*] No, Mees, not for young ladies.

BRYN. Do you like being a waiter, Gustave?

GUSTAVE. Yees, Mees—onlee one pitee—not time to talk to young ladees.

BRYN. We like you, Gustave.

GUSTAVE. [*With his patient ghost of a smile*] Verree glad, Mees. Excuse!

[He turns to go; the CHILDREN chant softly: "We like Gustave—we like Gustave—we like Gustave!" GUSTAVE gives them his patient smiling look back and goes.]

DIANA. Doesn't he look tired, Bryn? He's so old, and he has to run about like a rabbit. It's a shame. I'm sorry we rang, you know.

BRYN. I am thirsty, Di, and Mum makes such a fuss about water.

DIANA. Well, look here, I'll go down and get the ginger-ale. That'll save him.

[Opens the door.]

[The violinist has begun to play a tango called "Cumparsita."]

DIANA. It's a tango; while I'm gone you can practise, then we can dance it together.

BRYN. All right. Hurry up!

[DIANA goes out, closing the door, and can be seen stopping and sniffing in the corridor.]

[The music comes in at the window. BRYN, who has quite a good notion of a tango, stands a moment and then begins to dance. She soon becomes quite absorbed, and dances till the tune stops. She runs to the window and leans out; almost at once she recoils, sniffing; as she does so the light goes out in the room and corridor. She gasps, gropes to the door in the dim light from the open window, and after trying the switch, opens the door and calls softly, then more loudly: Di! Di!]

[DIANA appears from the corridor with candle.]

DIANA. [Excitedly] Bryn, the house is on fire. Are there any candles?

BRYN. I say! That'll be the first fire I've seen. Is it a real one?

DIANA. It's all over the place downstairs, and coming up fast.

BRYN. Up the stairs? Can't we get down, then?

DIANA. No. Hurry up! They can't put it out. [She finds and lights two candles.] There are four men and Gustave trying to.

BRYN. Shall we go down and help?

DIANA. No. We're to go on the roof. The engines are coming. Buck up!

BRYN. Have we got to dress?

DIANA. No; bung on your mack and shoes.

[*She is herself doing this.*]

BRYN. [*Beginning to bung*] But we shall miss it all on the roof, Di.

DIANA. We shall see the engines, and we can find a way down—there'll be iron stairs, I expect.

BRYN. Does Mum know?

DIANA. Of course she knows. I told them.

BRYN. [*Suddenly*] Listen! He's still playing—he can't know.

[*The violinist indeed is letting himself go on a Vivaldi-Bach Andante.*]

DIANA. We'll tell him as we go up. I routed out those stuffy old things.

BRYN. It's jolly exciting, isn't it? Is Dad helping to put it out?

DIANA. No, he's not well enough.

BRYN. Oh! Di, I must go down and see.

DIANA. [*Holding her*] No.

BRYN. It's not fair. You've had your go—— Well, let me startle those honeyspooners.

DIANA. All right! But hurry up!

[*BRYN rushes out with a candle into the corridor, where it is dark. The sound of a fire-engine is heard. DIANA puts on a cap and runs to the window. MRS. LENNOX enters from the corridor with her dressing-bag.*]

MRS. L. Where's Bryn, Di?

DIANA. [*Turning*] Oh! She's just stirring up the honeyspooners opposite.

MRS. L. The what! [*Seizing a suit-case.*] Help me put things in—everything will be spoiled by the water.

[*DIANA and she throw things into the suit-case. BRYN runs in.*]

BRYN. I say! The door *wasn't* locked. They were *eating*—in the dark. Didn't they stare just! Oh! Mum! Isn't it exciting?

MRS. L. Have you got your stockings on, Bryn?

BRYN. No.

MRS. L. Put them on, then.

BRYN. Over my pys, or under?

MRS. L. Under. And then get your sponge and things. Hurry! Now listen! You're both to go quietly up on the roof, take this bag up—and stay there till we come. Diana, take care of Bryn, and don't let her look over the edge. I must go back to Dad.

[*The TWO CHILDREN are gazing at her, BRYN putting on her stockings.*]

DIANA. [*Awed*] Is Dad really ill, Mum?

MRS. L. Yes.

BRYN. Oh! Isn't it awful, then!

MRS. L. [*At the door*] Now, my darlings, be good and do what I say.

DIANA. Yes, rather!

BRYN. Can't we help at all?

MRS. L. No, only by doing what I say.

BRYN. All right, then, we will.

MRS. L. Good girls. Bless you! [*She goes.*]

BRYN. Di, this is seeing "life," isn't it?

DIANA. You bet! Listen! He's still playing! Come on, Bryn! [*Each with a candle in one hand, bag, suit-case, and sponge-bags in the other, they go out and down the corridor.*]

BRYN. Look at our shadows, Di! Aren't they long?

The curtain falls.

SCENE IV

SECOND FLOOR

The same evening: Midnight

The adjoining bedroom. In the two beds side by side, facing the footlights, are MR. and MRS. BEETON.

MRS. BEETON is a decided-looking lady of about fifty, reading by the light of a bed-lamp. MR. BEETON, perhaps sixty, is asleep

on his back with his mouth open beneath his stubby moustache; from it are issuing faint but deepening snores.

MRS. B. [*Lowering her book*] Tom!

[MR. B. utters one of those louder snores cut off in the middle which mark the return to consciousness.

MR. B. Eh? What?

MRS. B. You were snoring.

MR. B. What! I wasn't.

MRS. B. You were.

MR. B. Well, why didn't you tell me? You know it gives me a sore throat.

MRS. B. I have told you.

MR. B. [*After a pause*] I suppose you think you *never* snore.

MRS. B. I know I don't.

MR. B. My hat!

MRS. B. You shouldn't lie on your back.

MR. B. [*Turning on his side*] I don't.

MRS. B. I wish you wouldn't contradict me, Tom.

MR. B. Contradict? I——?

MRS. B. Yes, say you don't! [*Pause.*

MR. B. I suppose you think you never contradict me.

MRS. B. Only when I have to.

MR. B. My Aunt! [*A pause*] What's the time?

MRS. B. Just struck twelve.

MR. B. What are you reading there?

MRS. B. A very silly book.

MR. B. Then why do you read it?

MRS. B. Because I'm not sleepy.

MR. B. I told you not to drink that coffee. That's why you drank it, I suppose.

MRS. B. Oh! go to sleep and let me read!

[MR. B. turns his back on her with a grunt. A silence. Then MRS. B. puts her book down.

MRS. B. [*Softly*] Tom! Are you asleep?

MR. B. Yes. Why?

MRS. B. What made you choose this hotel?

MR. B. It's got a name for cooking. The dinner was first chop.

MRS. B. There's illness in the house. I saw a nurse.

MR. B. Where?

MRS. B. Close by.

MR. B. Infectious?

MRS. B. How should I know?

MR. B. Didn't you ask?

MRS. B. No.

MR. B. If you'd told me, I'd——

MRS. B. Yes, what would you have done?

MR. B. Made a point of finding out, of course.

MRS. B. Exactly!

MR. B. [*Turning to her*] Well, d'you want to catch the 'flu?

MRS. B. Now, of course, you're in a stew!

MR. B. Fiddlesticks! I wish you wouldn't make me out an old woman.

MRS. B. I don't need to.

MR. B. Don't be funny!

MRS. B. It's a man who's ill.

MR. B. How d'you know?

MRS. B. The nurse was pretty.

MR. B. That's no proof. You got me a perfect hag last winter.

MRS. B. Naturally. There's a wife. She's very pale.

MR. B. You seem to see everything.

MRS. B. Listen, Tom! [*Pause.*] What's that tapping?

MR. B. I don't hear anything.

MRS. B. Of course you don't, with your head under the bedclothes like that.

MR. B. Look here! Do you want me to go to sleep or not?

MRS. B. Yes, or you'll be fit for nothing to-morrow. I don't want to have to drag you round half awake.

MR. B. All right, then! Good-night! [*Turns his back on her.*

MRS. B. There is a tapping, Tom. It's on this wall.

MR. B. [*Stirring*] Oh! damn! [*He frees his head.*

MRS. B. There!

[*A tapping sound.*]

MR. B. [*Screwing round towards the wall*] Here! What blasted lunatic——?

MRS. B. I wish you wouldn't swear, Tom.

MR. B. [*Thumping his fist on the wall*] Who is it next door?

MRS. B. It's those children.

MR. B. Children! Oh! Ah! Pretty kids! Well, I've stopped it.

MRS. B. I wonder you didn't tap back.

MR. B. [*Snuggling down*] I wish the deuce you—you——?

[*A silence, during which MRS. B. takes up her book.*]

MRS. B. [*Softly*] 'Tom! You're not asleep yet, are you?

MR. B. Yes.

MRS. B. You couldn't have been.

MR. B. Why not?

MRS. B. You weren't breathing.

MR. B. Well, I can sleep without breathing.

MRS. B. I can always tell when you're asleep. When you don't snore, you make a funny little ticking noise.

[*Clucks with her tongue, like the tick of a clock.*]

MR. B. Well, then, why d'you ask me?

MRS. B. I didn't want to wake you.

MR. B. Well, you have.

MRS. B. Did you fasten the door?

MR. B. Yes. No.

MRS. B. Hadn't you better, then?

MR. B. What's the matter?

MRS. B. You wouldn't like it if my pearls were stolen.

[*MR. B. gets out of bed and goes to the lower door, which he opens. He shuts the door and turns the key.*]

MR. B. Rowdy lot down there!

MRS. B. If you will choose little out-of-the-way hotels like this. I saw a young man with hair that stood out like a tea-tray.

MR. B. Black jappanned hair. That's rather good. What! [*Getting into bed again.*] Let's go to sleep!

MRS. B. Is the window open?

MR. B. About eight inches.

MRS. B. That's not enough. It's very stuffy to-night.

MR. B. [*Sighing*] All right! All right! [*Gets out of bed again and, going to the window, opens it wider.*] Now I suppose you'll say there's a draught.

MRS. B. Don't be cross!

MR. B. I'm not cross. [*Gets into bed.*] Are you going to put that light out?

MRS. B. Give me a kiss, Tom.

[*He jerks himself up, kisses her cheek perfunctorily, and subsides.*

MRS. B. *turns out the lamp. Darkness and silence. A sound of breathing rises.*

MRS. B. Tom!

MR. B. Um?

MRS. B. There's a mosquito!

MR. B. [*Sitting up alert*] What! No!

MRS. B. Listen! [*Pause.*] There! Now!

MR. B. [*The sportsman roused*] By Jove, there is! Turn up! [*Mrs. B. turns up the light.*] I must get my specs. [*He gets out of bed, puts on a pair of spectacles, takes up a slipper, turns on the full light and proceeds to revolve slowly on his heels, scrutinizing the ceiling and the walls.*] There he is! [*Pointing.*] No, it's a fly!

MRS. B. [*Whose ears are also standing up*] Tom! What's that? [*Points.*

MR. B. [*Approaching mark on wall*] It's an old one, squashed. [*Pointing.*] There he goes! Brute! Keep your eye on him!

MRS. B. How can I? I haven't seen him.

MR. B. There, there!

MRS. B. I see him. He's settled.

MR. B. Where?

MRS. B. [*Pointing*] Over that chest of drawers. Look! Right above—about five feet from the ceiling.

MR. B. Right-o! I'll get on the drawers. Keep him spotted! [*With the help of a chair he climbs cumbrously on to the chest of drawers, cautiously raises his arm; aims, and slaps the*

slipper on the wall.] God! I've missed him. [*Pauses, perched on chest of drawers gazing around.*] Lost him now—lost him—lost him! Where'd he go?

MRS. B. There he is, Tom!

MR. B. Where?

MRS. B. On the ceiling.

MR. B. [*Climbing down*] I'll fetch him off with a slipper. Where?

MRS. B. [*Pointing*] There!

MR. B. I spot him. [*Hurls slipper.*] He's off! Now! [*Both stare blankly.*] They're so damned invisible.

MRS. B. Look! He's settled over your bed. Take a towel. [*MR. BEETON gets a towel.*]

MR. B. Watch him, old girl. [*Climbs on to his bed.*] I believe I could reach him with the slipper.

MRS. B. The towel will be safer.

MR. B. Might flap him off.

MRS. B. You'll overbalance. Take good aim. Make sure of him this time!

MR. B. I'll get on the bolster.

[*He cautiously extends his arm upwards, makes a sudden furious dab with the slipper, and falls backwards on to the bed.*]

MRS. B. There now! I told you.

MR. B. [*On his back, with triumph*] Got him though! [*He scrutinizes the sole of the slipper.*] Look! [*Scrambling forward and showing it to her.*] No blood in him, thank God!

MRS. B. I must say you're splendid with mosquitoes, Tom.

MR. B. [*Resuming an upright posture on the floor*] Um, wasn't a bad shot—considering. Think there are any more?

[*He stands gazing round.*]

MRS. B. Tom!

MR. B. Hallo?

MRS. B. That very young man at dinner was the son of Lady Ilfracombe.

MR. B. How d'you know that?

MRS. B. Looked in the register. The Honourable Reginald Fanning.

MR. B. Looked rather a young juggins, I thought.

MRS. B. Two of the men he was with were very Stock-Exchangey. The other one leads him about, a Major Moulteney.

MR. B. How on earth you hear everything—I don't know!

MRS. B. I use my ears.

MR. B. You jolly well do! [*Turning out main light and moving towards his bed.*] There aren't any more.

[*He prepares to get into bed.*]

MRS. B. Tom! There's a tap dripping in the bathroom.

MR. B. Well, let it!

MRS. B. You know if you once begin to hear it, it'll get on your nerves.

MR. B. Oh! All right. [*Leaves the bed and opens door into bathroom.*] It isn't dripping.

MRS. B. I heard it, I tell you.

MR. B. You've got noises on the brain.

MRS. B. Will you go and look at the taps, instead of standing there, arguing. [*MR. BEETON disappears into the bathroom.*]

MRS. B. [*As he reappears*] Well?

MR. B. I suppose you might call it a drip with luck.

MRS. B. There!

MR. B. You needn't rub it in.

MRS. B. I never rub it in.

MR. B. My Sam! [*Prepares to get into bed.*]

[*The NURSE is seen in the corridor knocking at the door.*]

MRS. B. There's somebody knocking, Tom.

MR. B. Oh! Great Scott! [*Gets out of bed.*] What is it. [*Renewed knock.*] [*He puts on a dressing-gown and slippers, goes to the door and opens it.*] Yes?

NURSE. [*Outside*] My patient has severe heart pain. You haven't such a thing as a hypodermic needle? Mine's out of action.

MR. B. [*Leaning in*] It's the nurse—wants to know if we've got a hypodermic needle. Haven't, have we?

MRS. B. Of course not. What's the matter? Shall I——?

MR. B. [*To the NURSE*] Awfully sorry—afraid we haven't.
[*The NURSE is seen going back down the corridor.*] [*To his wife*]
It's a heart case—so that's all right. Poor devil! I suppose one ought to have one of those things handy. Nice-looking woman, what!

MRS. B. I thought you'd think so.

MR. B. There you go!

MRS. B. What do you mean by "There you go!"

MR. B. Nothing—nothing! [*Prepares to get into bed.*]

MRS. B. [*Ineffably*] Nothing, indeed!

MR. B. Oh! let's get to sleep.

[*Gets into bed and settles down with his back to her.*]

[*MRS. BEETON, after contemplating the back of his head with a certain acidity, turns out the lamp. Dark silence. Then a sound of sniffing.*]

MRS. B. [*Sharply*] Tom!

MR. B. Good Lord! What now?

MRS. B. There's a smell of burning.

[*The light in the corridor goes out.*]

MR. B. What next? It's your nose, now.

MRS. B. [*Sniffing*] Can't you smell it?

MR. B. [*Sniffing*] Um? Yes—yes—distinct. Now, what the deuce?

MRS. B. You didn't throw a match or a cigarette into——?

MR. B. I like that, when you wouldn't let me smoke!

MRS. B. It's getting worse. [*Tries to turn up lamp.*] Tom! The light's off!

MR. B. Nonsense! You imagine things.

MRS. B. It is, I tell you.

MR. B. I'll try the other switch. [*Gets out of bed in the dark and stubs his toe.*] Damn! Stubbed my toe! Where is that switch?

MRS. B. By the door.

MR. B. [*Feeling the wall*] Can't find it. Oh! Here it is! Doesn't work.

MRS. B. What did I say?

MR. B. Fuse must have blown out.

MRS. B. Where are your matches?

MR. B. How should I know? Dash it! [*Groping.*] Ow-w! Done it again!

MRS. B. Pull the curtains, there'll be some light. [*Sniffs.*] It's getting worse, Tom. [*Gets out of bed.*]

MR. B. [*Pulling the curtains. A feeble light comes in.*] Here they are, on the chest of drawers. Who put 'em there?

MRS. B. You did. [*Donning dressing-gown and slippers.*] Light a candle.

[MR. BEETON strikes a match and gropes round, seeking. MRS. BEETON stands at the bottom of her bed sniffing.]

MR. B. Where—where are they? Oh! Here's one! [*Lighting candle and gazing round.*] Nothing wrong here. I'll go and scout. [*He goes towards the door.*]

[*The pyjamad figure of the child DIANA LENNOX is seen outside in the corridor.*]

MRS. B. Be careful, Tom!

MR. B. All right, all right! Hallo!

[*The door is burst open in his face by DIANA, with a lighted candle in her hand.*]

MRS. B. There! You never fastened the door again, Tom!

DIANA. Awfully sorry! But the house is on fire. Isn't it exciting?

MRS. B. On fire? What d'you mean, on fire?

DIANA. On fire. You can't get down. It's caught the stairs. We've to go on the roof. They've telephoned for the engines.

MRS. B. Tom! [*Pointing.*] Look!

[*A flicker as of flame from below is dimly seen through the window.*]

MR. B. She's right! Here's a mess! Where are my trousers? Keep cool! [*To the CHILD*] You keep your head, young woman. [*Seeking.*] Damn it, where are my trousers? [*DIANA has flitted with her candle, and her figure is seen flying*]

up the corridor, which is now dark again. MRS. BEETON, in the dim light, is hitching up her nightgown under a skirt.] Keep cool, old girl, keep cool! [Drawing trousers over his pyjamas.] We'll pack. Put on your long coat! Where the hell is everything? Put your pearls on. Where's my watch?

MRS. B. [Cooler than he] Under your pillow, of course, Tom.
[The door is again opened, GUSTAVE enters.]

GUSTAVE. [Gently] Sare, Madame! The 'ouse is fired.

MR. B. Yes, yes, we know. Who's responsible? Why don't you put it out?

GUSTAVE. A beeg fire—the engines come.

MRS. B. Can't we get downstairs?

GUSTAVE. Non, Madame—the roof. Veree comfortable—a fine view. Excuse! The sick gentleman.

[He vanishes down the dark corridor.]

MR. B. Where are the passports—in your dressing-case?

MRS. B. Yes. I must do my hair, 'Tom. I'm not going out like a fright.

MR. B. Nonsense! What does your appearance matter?

MRS. B. You never think of my appearance.

MR. B. Stuff it under your collar. They'll think you're shingled.

MRS. B. [With finality] I'm going to do my hair.

MR. B. All right, all right! Hurry up with it, then! The house'll burn like tinder. These French houses are all wood and paint.

MRS. B. [Before glass] I must have the candle, Tom. Put it there. I call it frightfully careless not letting us know until the stairs were caught.

MR. B. [Packing] I've got my dress things anyway. You won't have time to pack.

MRS. B. I shall take my dressing-bag.

MR. B. Got your keys and your watch? Right. I'll get my shaving things. [Sound of a fire-engine.] By George! There's an engine!

[Goes into bathroom.]

MRS. B. Don't forget the toothbrushes. [Twisting and

rolling her hair; to herself.] Tt, tt, it really is annoying! [*Turns suddenly at a knock, with pins in her mouth.*] Come in!

[*GUSTAVE's figure is dimly seen in the dark corridor.*

GUSTAVE. [*At the door*] Madame! Time to go on the roof, Madame.

MRS. B. [*Through the pins*] Yes, yes! I can't be hurried.

GUSTAVE. I carry bag, Madame?

MRS. B. [*Putting hairpinned hand on her dressing-bag*] No, don't you touch that. Take this suit-case.

[*There comes a howl from the bathroom.*

VOICE OF MR. B. Wow! I——! It's so damned dark!

MRS. B. Come along, Tom—never mind——

MR. B. [*Reappearing with sponge-bags, etc.*] Can't find my shaving brush. [*To GUSTAVE*] Hi, here's a soaked bath towel—might come in handy. [*Throws it to GUSTAVE, who places it over his arm like a napkin.*

GUSTAVE. Yes, Sarc! Please come, queeck, Sarc and Madame.

MR. B. All right, all right! Ready, old girl?

MRS. B. [*With a final pin and pat*] I've never done my hair so quickly—how does it look, Tom?

MR. B. Jolly fine—jolly fine! Here's your coat. [*Puts it on her.*] Now then! [*He takes up the dressing-bag. The sound of a fire-engine approaching is heard.*] There's another! Good biz!

GUSTAVE. Sarc, Madame—please, queeck! [*He goes out.*

MR. B. All right, all right! Plenty of time. No good getting the wind up.

MRS. B. Now, Tom, give me your word not to be rash.

MR. B. Rash! I'm never rash.

[*They go to the door, pass out, leaving the room dark, and are seen in the corridor, MRS. BEETON carrying the candle.*

MR. B. [*Without*] Here, take these, I've forgotten my pipe. [*Sound of engines; then voice of MR. BEETON in the dark, within the room again.*] Where did I put the blasted thing?

MRS. B. [*Without*] Tom, I'm not going up without you.

VOICE OF MR. B. [*Within*] All right, all right, coming! [*To himself*] I know—got it! Wow! My shin! [*Goes out.*]

MR. B. [*In the corridor*] Come on, old girl, up we go!

VOICE OF MRS. B. Does my nightgown show, Tom?

VOICE OF MR. B. What? No! Yes! Yes! Looks jolly well—jolly well! [*Their voices die.*]

The curtain falls.

SCENE V

SECOND FLOOR

The same evening: Midnight.

Another bedroom. The neighbouring clock is striking twelve.

[*The door opens and there enters a YOUNG WOMAN in evening dress with a wrap over her arm.*]

YOUNG WOMAN. [*As the clock finishes*] Twelve! How nice and early!

[*She turns up the light. The room is then seen to be in the disorder of a hurried unpacking, as of travellers just in from a train hastening down to dinner. She throws down her wrap and tidies the dressing-table, humming and whistling the "Habanera" from "Carmen."* She lays some pyjamas on a bed, then stands before the glass. She is an attractive young person. Breaking into the song, she sits down before the glass and touches herself up. The door is opened softly and the YOUNG MAN, "Tony," in evening dress with a coat over his arm and a hat, comes in; he puts them down, comes up, leans over and kisses her.

YOUNG MAN. [*Fervently*] Darling!

YOUNG WOMAN. Oh! Tony! [*Puts her lips to his. A pause. [The YOUNG MAN sits on the edge of the dressing-table and lights a cigarette.*]

YOUNG MAN. We took a chance, Nell—going to the opera.

YOUNG WOMAN. Ah! but Carmen's worth it. Gives you such a kick.

YOUNG MAN. D'you know, there's young Fanning in the hotel. Rotten luck! A little out-of-the-way place like this! I chose it so carefully.

YOUNG WOMAN. Fanning? D'you mean that babe Reggie? He was in pinafores last year—absolute mother's darling.

YOUNG MAN. He's being bear-led to get him ready for the Guards. It's all right. He hasn't seen you, and he shan't. I don't know the man he's with, luckily.

YOUNG WOMAN. No. But perhaps I do.

YOUNG MAN. [*Gloomily*] That's the worst of good cooking. You never know who'll be gathered round the fleshpots.

YOUNG WOMAN. I didn't have much of them to-night, after that crossing. Ugh!

YOUNG MAN. [*Gazing at her and chanting under his breath*] Carmen! Carmen! Nell, I shall call you Carmen.

YOUNG WOMAN. [*Suddenly*] Tony! Tell me! Is *ours* a grand passion? Is it?

YOUNG MAN. If it wasn't, Nell, would you be here with me?

YOUNG WOMAN. [*Laying hold of his lapels*] But is it? Is there any such thing nowadays?

YOUNG MAN. Of course there is.

YOUNG WOMAN. I wonder! If it *is* a grand passion, it's going to be an awful life, Tony. Unless—I've got the pluck to cut the painter.

YOUNG MAN. What d'you mean, Nell? Of course you're going to cut the painter, or you wouldn't have come, and I wouldn't have asked you.

YOUNG WOMAN. [*Turning round and gazing past him*] But, Tony, this is only a try-out. I thought you realized that?

YOUNG MAN. A try-out? Yes. But there's only one end to it.

YOUNG WOMAN. My grandmother ran away for good in what she stood up in. But *this* isn't a runaway age, Tony. It's an age of calculated divorce.

YOUNG MAN. I don't care what the rotten age is. I'm in love.

YOUNG WOMAN. Besides, she hated her husband, and I

don't hate Charles. I've tried to, but I can't. He means nothing. You can't hate something that means nothing.

YOUNG MAN. Well, *I* hate him.

YOUNG WOMAN. Only because he has me. And not enough to stick a knife into me, like Don José, if I go back to him.

YOUNG MAN. I'd stick a knife into *him* fast enough, if you went back after this!

YOUNG WOMAN. [*Shaking her head*] Not done in the best circles, Tony.

YOUNG MAN. If I could without being hanged.

YOUNG WOMAN. That's mean.

YOUNG MAN. Passion makes you mean. I don't know what I'd have done if you hadn't come, Nell. I couldn't have stood it any more.

YOUNG WOMAN. No; but, Tony, for both our sakes—we really have got to find out; I couldn't go wrong a second time. Think of my reputation!

YOUNG MAN. Nell!

YOUNG WOMAN. No, don't look like that! I've been married and you haven't. I've seen a man flare up for me and go out. I've seen myself make a terrible bloomer. Who knows whether *we* shall have burned out or be still alight three weeks from now?

YOUNG MAN. [*Squeezing out his cigarette*] Alight, and flaming!

YOUNG WOMAN. I wonder.

YOUNG MAN. [*Putting his hands on her shoulders and turning her square to him*] You little doubter! No, I shan't call you Carmen. She didn't talk about try-outs.

YOUNG WOMAN. She was a prize vamp. I'm only an average vamp, Tony.

YOUNG MAN. You're not a vamp.

YOUNG WOMAN. Vamp: Siren: Enchantress: *vide* Delilah: species of female given to pursuit of the male. Did I pursue you, Tony?

YOUNG MAN. No, darling.

YOUNG WOMAN. Did you pursue me?

YOUNG MAN. No, darling.

YOUNG WOMAN. What happened then?

YOUNG MAN. We looked, we touched, we loved. Could we help it?

YOUNG WOMAN. Of course we could have helped it—by being unhappy.

YOUNG MAN. In torment, Nell. You are all I want.

YOUNG WOMAN. Oh! what a stretcher! All—for the moment.

YOUNG MAN. For ever.

YOUNG WOMAN. Darling, what optimism! You're not selling a horse.

YOUNG MAN. No, I'm buying my life.

YOUNG WOMAN. So you think now.

YOUNG MAN. I know my mind.

YOUNG WOMAN. Doesn't the mind change? When the cake is eaten the child begins to cry. [*Taking his ears.*] I love you, Tony, but I don't know if I shall three weeks hence. And suppose I don't!

YOUNG MAN. You will.

YOUNG WOMAN. And suppose you don't!

YOUNG MAN. I shall.

YOUNG WOMAN. So speaks the hungry male. [*Rising and clasping her hands to her waist.*] Tony, I've got an awful sinking—not a moral sinking, a real one—you know, I practically had no dinner.

YOUNG MAN. My poor lamb! Where's the bell? How about caviare? [*Rings.*]

YOUNG WOMAN. Marvellous.

YOUNG MAN. And that stuff—Château Yquem.

YOUNG WOMAN. Divine! I could live on them for months. Oh! Tony, I shall be awfully happy when I've had them.

YOUNG MAN. I thought there was something wrong with your blood-pressure. [*GUSTAVE can be seen outside in the corridor.*]

YOUNG WOMAN. It simply isn't pressing. Look! There's a nice little table. [*As the YOUNG MAN places it and two chairs there comes a knock.*] Entrez!

GUSTAVE. [*Entering*] Sare—Madame?

YOUNG WOMAN. Oh!—er—est ce que vous avez du caviare?

GUSTAVE. Ye-es, Madame—veree good, veree fresh.

YOUNG MAN. Oh! then bring a lot, will you, quick; and lemon and butter and bread—never mind toasting it. Oh! and a bottle of Château Yquem.

GUSTAVE. No, Sare—with caviare, too sweet, Sare. A 'ock, Sare. Schloss Johannisberg—veree fine.

YOUNG MAN. All right!

GUSTAVE. An olive, Sare—leetle olives veree black, veree good.

YOUNG MAN. Yes, olives; but quick, please.

GUSTAVE. [*Nodding, with his faint smile*] Ye-es, Sare.

[*He slides away and can be seen hastening down the corridor.*]

YOUNG MAN. That old chap knows what's what.

YOUNG WOMAN. He has a charming face. I should hate having to bring nice things for other people to eat all day. What's that? [*She listens, leaning against the foot-rail of the bed.*]

[*A sound of caterwauling from the corridor.*]

YOUNG MAN. Cats—courting! Jolly, isn't it? This is a queer little old place, awfully French.

YOUNG WOMAN. [*As the sound swells and suddenly ceases*] Tony, I was wondering—have we got any further than *that*?

YOUNG MAN. I don't know and I don't care—I've got *you*.

[*But instead of seizing her he only lifts her hand to his lips.*]

YOUNG WOMAN. Thank you, dear, for that moderate gesture. It gives me hope. Has it ever struck you, Tony, that the great thing about love is that each should know by instinct what the other wants at the moment?

YOUNG MAN. Yes. [*Hesitating.*] I've written a poem to you, Nell.

YOUNG WOMAN. Tony! How *thrilling*! That is exactly what I want at the moment. Let's hear it. Now! At once!

YOUNG MAN. Not till you're stronger—You must be nourished. [*A knock.*] Here it comes.

[*Enter GUSTAVE with tray, which he disposes.*

GUSTAVE. Caviare, Sare—veree fresh. The wine a little cold.

YOUNG MAN. Splendid!

[*The two seat themselves. GUSTAVE helps them to caviare.*

GUSTAVE. A squeeze of lemon, Madame. Ye-es.

YOUNG MAN. [*Apologetic*] Afraid this is rather late for you. We've been to the Opéra Comique. [*They eat.*

GUSTAVE. Ye-es, Sarc. *Carmen*. Verree nice.

YOUNG WOMAN. Oh! Do you know it?

GUSTAVE. Not in de flesh, Madame. I listen-in one time.

YOUNG WOMAN. You never get a chance in the evening, I suppose?

GUSTAVE. Non, Madame?

YOUNG MAN. Don't you ever get off?

GUSTAVE. Oh! ycs, Sare—Sundays.

YOUNG MAN. Sundays? Can you get any fun then?

GUSTAVE. I go feeshing, Sare. [*Pouring out wine.*] Verree nice, Madame.

YOUNG WOMAN. [*Drinking*] Lovely!

GUSTAVE. What a wine! It 'ave a perfume. Like life, Madame? Anyt'ing else, Sare?

YOUNG MAN. Nothing, thank you. And never mind about the tray.

GUSTAVE. No, Sare. What time I bring the coffee, to-morrow morning?

YOUNG MAN. Oh! say—ten o'clock.

GUSTAVE. Verree good, Sare. Bon soir, Madame! Bon soir, Monsieur!

BOTH. Bon soir! [*GUSTAVE goes.*

YOUNG WOMAN. Nice old man! "I go feeshing, Sare!" This caviare's divine, Tony. It was an inspiration; and the wine's perfect. Now for the poem—all about me!

YOUNG MAN. [*Producing a sheet of paper*] I know it by heart. Sure you're up to it, Nell?

YOUNG WOMAN. Try me!

THE YOUNG MAN. [*Leaning a little towards her, begins*]

“Avowal.

“Thou art my Love, and I alway,
That nothing rueful thee dismay,
My every waking thought intend
From this beginning to the end.
And in my sleep I dream of thee
That unto me thou linkéd art,
And we are sailing, thou and I,
To watch the silver fishes fly,
The stars uncounted in the sky,
And that great floorway of the sea.”

YOUNG WOMAN. [*Under her breath*] I love that!

[*He goes and sits beside her till their faces are close together.*]

YOUNG MAN. “Then come with me if thou would’st know

A summer that will never go,
Flowers unfading and the tune
Of sheep-bells wandering in June.
And I will conjure till these seem
Such part of elfin land to thee,
That backed on swallow thou shalt fly
And chase the thistle floating by,
And ride on moonbeams thro’ the sky
To rob dark night of ecstasy.

I am a world devoted quite,
That lives but when thou’rt in my sight,
Ah! dwell in me, and I will try
To make thee happy till I die.”

[*He drops the paper, from which indeed he has not been reading, and seizes her hand.*]

YOUNG WOMAN. [*Emotionalized*] Tony! [*Looking at him.*]
All that?

YOUNG MAN. [*With her hand to his lips*] And more!

[*He kisses her hand till she draws it away.*]

YOUNG WOMAN. But are people ever faithful? Look at me!

YOUNG MAN. You had no luck, Nell. The real thing's a divine accident, and it's happened to us.

YOUNG WOMAN. So all lovers say until they've had enough. You don't know me, Tony, you don't know me.

YOUNG MAN. Better than you know yourself.

YOUNG WOMAN. I'm a selfish baggage. I want my own way.

YOUNG MAN. More than you want me?

YOUNG WOMAN. Perhaps. I'll have to be tested.

YOUNG MAN. You *will* be.

YOUNG WOMAN. And suppose I don't stand fire?

YOUNG MAN. You will.

YOUNG WOMAN. But if I didn't!

YOUNG MAN. [*Sombrely*] "Who dares not put it to the touch?"

YOUNG WOMAN. Do you despise me, Tony?

YOUNG MAN. "Thou art my Love, and I alway——"

YOUNG WOMAN. Tony, you're single-hearted, you ought to be exhibited. Listen! [*They listen. The violinist has begun to play the "Cumparsita."*] "Cumparsita!" My favourite tango.

YOUNG MAN. [*Filling the glasses and holding his up*] Nell! Death to doubt!

YOUNG WOMAN. [*Raising her glass*] "Death to——"

[*The light goes out.*]

YOUNG MAN. Hallo!

YOUNG WOMAN. Is that an omen?

YOUNG MAN. A good one. To our leap in the dark. No heel-taps. [*Drinks.*]

YOUNG WOMAN. [*Drinking—with a little laugh*] Well! Light up! There are some candles on the dressing-table.

YOUNG MAN. It'll come up again directly. There's light enough to eat by. Eat, pretty creature, eat! [*They sit and eat.*]

YOUNG WOMAN. Feasts in the dark at school! Sardines on Bath olivers, rolling off on to the beds. This wine's going right down into my toes. D'you know that feeling? Darling Tony!

You *have* been sweet to me to-day. After my exhibition on the boat! If you could stand that, you can stand anything.

YOUNG MAN. From you, Nell.

YOUNG WOMAN. Tony, you're a fanatic! [*Holding out her glass.*] My love to you!

[*BRYN with her candle is seen in the corridor. They clink glasses. The door is burst open; BRYN, with her lighted candle, stands before them.*]

YOUNG MAN. Hallo!

BRYN. Oh! You're eating! Awfully sorry! I thought you'd like to know the house is on fire. You can't get down. We've got to go on the roof. [*She flies out again, banging the door.*]

YOUNG WOMAN. [*In consternation*] Tony!

YOUNG MAN. [*Sniffing*] By Jove! There is a fire! What awful luck! [*He jumps up, gropes, and lights candles.*]

[*The YOUNG WOMAN has gone to the door and opened it.*]

YOUNG WOMAN. I can see the flames down there. Tony, I'm scared—I'm scared.

YOUNG MAN. It'll be all right, darling. We've hardly taken anything out. Jam the things in. We'll take our bags up on the roof; we can get the big luggage at the station and be off by the first train.

YOUNG WOMAN. I hate fire—we had a fire once, at home. It's awful.

YOUNG MAN. Don't worry, darling, we shall be all right up there—they'll soon get us down. Put on your travelling coat.

[*They are hurriedly putting things into a suit-case and dressing-bag.*]

YOUNG WOMAN. But, Tony, you don't see. We shall be spotted! Reggie Fanning!

YOUNG MAN. Oh! damn him! Look here, put this scarf over your head, it'll hide your face if he comes up there. [*He winds it round her head.*] You look so sweet!

YOUNG WOMAN. Kiss me! I feel this is the end, Tony. We shall never——

YOUNG MAN. [*Kissing her*] Now, now, Nell! Stay here a minute. [*He goes into the corridor.*]

[*The BEETONS pass him in the corridor.*]

MR. B. [*To him*] Awkward, isn't it? What! This hotel's dam' badly managed. We've got to go on the roof.

YOUNG MAN. So I hear, Sir. [*Into the room.*] Stout couple just gone up. Ready, Nell? It's all clear.

YOUNG WOMAN. "The stars in their courses fought against Sisera."

YOUNG MAN. Bosh! It's the test, Nell—and we'll see it through. Come on! [*Looking out again.*] Now, darling!

[*She goes out, he looks round him, catches up his coat and hat, and candle in hand, follows.*]

YOUNG WOMAN. Which way, Tony?

YOUNG MAN. Make for the musician.

The curtain falls.

SCENE VI

SECOND FLOOR

The same evening: Midnight.

A fourth and fully lighted room.

[HENRY LENNOX, in a dressing-gown, is (standing) facing the window, on the Right, which is wide open. He is a thin man past fifty, with a pale, whimsical, wistful face, across which pass at times spasms of pain. MRS. LENNOX comes from the bathroom.]

MRS. L. Harry, how naughty of you!

LENNOX. Yes, my love. Let me stand awhile in thought. And look here, my dear. It's midnight. You go to bed.

MRS. L. Are you easier, Harry?

LENNOX. M'm! Yes. Always easier. Some day very easy.

MRS. L. Don't!

LENNOX. My child, we all have to walk out, some time.

Pointing to window.] Look at that! Nice little square—I always liked Paris—it hath a pleasant stink. But what I miss in this room is a view of the workers on the top floors—most characteristic thing in France, those workers on the top floors, busy as ants.

MRS. L. Yes, what *do* they make?

LENNOX. Cotton, tape, and laces. Where's Nurse?

MRS. L. Having her supper downstairs. She'll be up directly.

LENNOX. [*Moving to the sofa*] Nice woman—not ordinary—got background, I should say. The thing I most regret in life, Evelyn, is that I haven't known all about everybody I've ever met.

MRS. L. [*With a smile*] That's modest.

LENNOX. Modest but greedy.

MRS. L. You're not greedy.

LENNOX. Avid, my dear. Haven't written half enough books, or half good enough. Haven't loved half enough women.

MRS. L. [*Dryly*] I'm sorry.

LENNOX. Nothing personal, my love. Never eaten at a sitting as many oysters as I should like—not by dozens. But, as I say, what I regret most is not having been in the skin of everybody else.

MRS. L. You *are* absurd.

LENNOX. [*After lying still a moment with his eyes closed from pain*] Imagine! You mayn't stare at people; you mayn't listen to their private conversations; you mayn't even get under their beds; you mayn't do anything that would give you some real knowledge of them. It's tragic; or rather it's a clean stopper on comedy. And comedy is the saving grace, my love.

[*With a smile cut off by pain.*

MRS. L. Oh! You're in pain again! Why doesn't Nurse come!

[*She goes towards the door.*

LENNOX. Don't spoil her supper. They cook jolly well here.

MRS. L. As if her supper mattered!

LENNOX. That's where you're too English, my love, grasping at conscience and missing casseroles. That poor woman would

come rushing up supperless, and what can she do? The digitalis is over there [*Pointing*] if you want to give me some. [MRS. LENNOX *measures a dose.*] That's what I like about the French. By giving full spiritual attention to the body they avoid starvation and repletion, and so are able to give full bodily attention to the spirit.

MRS. L. [*Bringing him the dose*] Better not talk any more.

LENNOX. I won't. [*Drinking.*] We English, you know, still look on the body as the devil. It's bad form, until it's dead—then we're all over it. The body becomes sacred at once. We catch our deaths burying it—by the way, don't let anybody get pneumonia over me. We write books about it. We dig it up to search for arsenic; and sit on it for weeks together. And we assert that it's going to rise again. Considering how we treat it till it's dead, it's unreasonable. But, after all, what would the English be without their sweet unreasonableness.

MRS. L. Now that's enough, Harry!

LENNOX. [*Taking her hand*] Right you are, dear one. That stuff always goes to my head. Where are the girls sleeping?

MRS. L. Quite close. They're wildly excited about Paris. Harry, I *should* like to get home; d'you think you'll be able to travel the day after to-morrow?

LENNOX. [*Patting her hand*] I'll have a good stab at it, as my more genial colleagues say.

MRS. L. We can take Nurse on for the journey. Oh! Here she is!

[*The NURSE is seen outside in the corridor. She enters, attractive in her uniform, and with an unprofessional smile.*]

NURSE. So sorry I've been so long. There's only one waiter on duty, and he's on the run all the time, poor old fellow.

MRS. L. I think I'll go and see if the children are all right. He's just had a dose, Nurse. [*She goes out, and is seen going down the corridor.*]

LENNOX. Nurse, there's some one playing the violin.

NURSE. I've been talking to the young man. He's a Yugo-

Slav, who's been in America ten years. He says you're much loved in the States.

LENNOX. Yes, I've never been there.

[*The strains of the violin float in through the open window. They listen. On LENNOX's face comes a smile at first, then a sombre melancholy. The playing stops.*]

LENNOX. I know that little tune—"Le Joli Gilles," by Poise—used to hear Corsanego play it at Monte in the 'nineties. [*Suddenly to the NURSE, who is at the window looking out*] Nurse, forgive an awkward question—but you must have seen a lot of death. Is it, or isn't it?

NURSE. [*Turning*] The end? I don't know, Mr. Lennox; I don't think so.

LENNOX. I'm afraid it *is*.

NURSE. [*Turning to him*] I once saw an old lady die, she was all darkened and drawn, quite unconscious. Suddenly she smiled very faintly, very sweetly, and was gone. Why—why did she smile, if something hadn't opened to her? It was so happy.

LENNOX. "She got a crown—we got a crown—

All God's chillen got a crown."

But what if the crown is just relief at oblivion, Nurse?

NURSE. Could one smile at nothingness?

LENNOX. I wonder. This attack may finish me, you know. I've had three. One oughtn't to be so interested in one's own concerns, but then, you see, [*With a smile*] one is.

NURSE. [*Coming over to him*] Of course, one is. But it's going to be all right with care.

LENNOX. It'd be better for my wife if it were all over. It's terrible for her. Nothingness! [*With a smile.*] There's no realizing that one won't *be*!

NURSE. [*Eagerly*] But that's just it, Mr. Lennox. Surely if one can't realize nothingness, death *can't* be the end?

LENNOX. [*Shaking his head*] I'm afraid that belief in the persistence of life is just natural to the state of being alive; Nurse. Under an anæsthetic one has no belief in anything, and no life anywhere.

NURSE. I believe there's an answer to that.

LENNOX. I hope you're right, Nurse. The eternal anæsthetic?

"Home is the sailor, home from sea,
And the hunter home from the hill."

That's the spirit to die in and I haven't got it, Nurse. I funk dying; and I'm afraid of showing that I funk it. Do I show?

NURSE. You certainly don't.

LENNOX. Good! It's been a relief to confess. What made you take up nursing?

NURSE. [*Simply*] I lost my husband.

LENNOX. Long?

NURSE. Four years ago—in a motor smash.

LENNOX. Poor Nurse!

NURSE. [*Simply*] I don't like to think death's the end; I want to see him again. [LENNOX *nods*.] But I know that's not a reason. [*Looking into his face*.] You ought to have some nourishment, now. There's some very nice cold consommé downstairs. [*She rings*.] That old waiter Gustave is such a dear. When the French are nice, they're awfully nice.

LENNOX. I've always wanted to write the story of a waiter.

NURSE. Have a talk with him when he comes up.

LENNOX. [*With a sigh*] It won't tell me what he's thinking. And that's my job—to tell how people feel and think by the way they don't look and act. There's one thing, Nurse, we're all better, or at least more vivid, than we seem. Life's a pagoda. We hatch in the basement and take wings on the roof, and in between we live masked in a sort of unending bluff, and who knows what we're really like?

NURSE. Gustave is transparent anyway—patient to the core, and looks it. [GUSTAVE *is seen in the corridor*.]

LENNOX. I envy people with patience—I never had any. [*There is a knock*.] Come in!

[*The door is opened and GUSTAVE appears*.]

GUSTAVE. Sare?

NURSE. Monsieur would like some of that nice cold consommé, Gustave.

GUSTAVE. Ye-es, Sare. I get it. A biscuit, thin, and creesp. Ye-es?

LENNOX. What's the name of the violinist, Gustave?

GUSTAVE. Froba, Sare, verree clevere. He annoy you, Sare?

LENNOX. Not a bit! He's got a touch.

GUSTAVE. Ye-es, Sare. He make it speak.

NURSE. *I'll get the consommé, Gustave. Stay and talk to Mr. Lennox.*

GUSTAVE. *Merci, Mademoiselle—verree kind!*

[The NURSE goes out and down the corridor.]

LENNOX. Sit down, Gustave. You must be tired.

GUSTAVE. *[Sitting; with his faint smile]* Ye-es, Sare—the feet a leetle.

LENNOX. Always a waiter?

GUSTAVE. From the cradle, as you say, Sare.

LENNOX. Good life?

GUSTAVE. One is accustomed.

LENNOX. Not married?

GUSTAVE. No, Sare, no time as yet.

LENNOX. But you must be my age, I should think.

GUSTAVE. *[With his faint smile]* Yes, Sare. Perhaps I range myself some day—'oo know?

LENNOX. Well, you see every kind of type—that's something. But I suppose you haven't time to study them.

GUSTAVE. 'Ave a leetle fun some time, Sare.

LENNOX. You get human nature about at its worst—satisfying appetite. Ugly thing appetite, Gustave.

GUSTAVE. *[Shrugging]* To eat, to drink, to love—verree natural, Sare.

LENNOX. Wasn't it Maupassant who said—the only way to avoid temptation was to yield to it. That the measure of the human being, Gustave?

GUSTAVE. No, Sare. But it need an occasion to show what else more is dere.

LENNOX. Right you are!

GUSTAVE. De war, Sare—'oo knowed 'oo was brave, and

'oo was not till de war. De poltroon suddenly was brave, and de brave sometime poltroon. But 'ow few de poltroon!

LENNOX. See anything of it yourself, Gustave?

GUSTAVE. Yes, Sare. Was steward in Engleesh transports—veree uncomfortable. And the sousmarines, oh! là, là! verree annoying.

LENNOX. Were you sunk?

GUSTAVE. Three time, Sare. I bob like a cork. But I learn English.

LENNOX. And human nature.

GUSTAVE. Yes, Sare. Verree funny—but sometime verree fine.

[A noise is heard. GUSTAVE rises and opens the door. The sound resolves itself into a cry of "We want cocktails—we want cocktails!"

LENNOX. Voice crying in the wilderness? Um?

GUSTAVE. [Smiling] Ye-es, Sare. A gentleman—'e want cocktails.

LENNOX. And you've got to get 'em?

GUSTAVE. Ye-es, Sare; excuse! I bring the consommé—verree nice, verree cold.

[GUSTAVE goes out and down the corridor, passing MRS. LENNOX.

LENNOX. An occasion to show! [To himself] O God! Let me not show fear! [As MRS. LENNOX enters] Chicks all right?

MRS. L. Wild as kittens. I left them in bed, but I'm sure they won't stay there. Where's Nurse?

LENNOX. Bringing me up some fodder. I've had the old waiter here. Such a type! [Draws in his breath at sharp pain.

MRS. L. [Anxiously] Harry!

LENNOX. [Eyes shut, faintly] It's all right, it's all right.

[The NURSE is seen in the corridor.

MRS. L. [Going to the door] Oh! Nurse, quick!

[The NURSE enters with a cup and some biscuits, puts them down and goes quickly to LENNOX. She and MRS. LENNOX stand close to him in great anxiety.

MRS. L. Can't anything be done to stop that pain?

NURSE. Hypodermic—I'm terribly sorry—just had an accident with my needle.

MRS. L. Perhaps the people next door?

NURSE. I'll try them.

[*Goes quickly to the door and out into the corridor. The spasm passes. LENNOX lies exhausted.*]

LENNOX. [*Smiling faintly*] So sorry!

MRS. L. Oh! Harry.

LENNOX. The old waiter was telling me what happened to him in the war. He was sunk three times and bobbed like a cork—the old hero. [*The NURSE returns.*]

NURSE. No luck! [*Looking at LENNOX.*] Thank heaven, it's passed.

[*MRS. LENNOX turns up to the window, crying quietly. The figure of the child DIANA is seen coming up the corridor. While the NURSE stands close, looking compassionately down at LENNOX, the door is softly opened and the head of DIANA is poked in.*]

DIANA. [*Excitedly whispering*] May I come in, Nurse?

LENNOX. [*Overhearing*] Come on, rogue! [*DIANA comes in.*]

DIANA. There's such a smell of burning, Daddy. I think something's on fire. Can I go down and see?

MRS. L. [*Turning sharply from the window*] 'Ssh! Diana—Daddy's not——

NURSE. [*Sniffing*] There is a smell of burning—I'll go.

DIANA. No, please, Nurse—let me, let me! I simply must.

[*She flies to the door and goes out. She is hardly out of the room before the light goes out.*]

MRS. L. How maddening!

LENNOX. Patience, my dear! My matches are on the chest of drawers, Nurse.

NURSE. I've got them. [*Strikes one.*] Oh! there are some candles. [*Lights two candles.*]

MRS. L. [*Distracted*] Diana wandering about in the dark. I—— [*She goes to the door. Sharply*] Nurse! [*The NURSE goes to her.*] Look! Look! Whatever is that glare, and the noise? Ring the bell!

VOICE OF DIANA. [*Without*] Mum! [*She comes in.*] The house *is* on fire, Mum. It's down there. There are some men trying to put it out. They're buzzing about like bees. Isn't it exciting?

MRS. L. 'Ssh!

LENNOX. [*Sitting up*] All right, my dear. It's doing me good. [*They turn towards him.*]

DIANA. Oh! Nurse, give me a candle. I'll go and warn everybody. What fun if we have to go on the roof!

[*She snatches a candle and runs off down the corridor.*]

LENNOX. [*Getting to a sitting position*] I'll get into marching order, Nurse.

[*The NURSE has found another candle, and lighted it. MRS. LENNOX brings his coat and waistcoat, and helps him on with them. Through the still open door come confused sounds.*]

NURSE. [*Calmly*] They'll put it out all right. Don't move yet, Mr. Lennox.

[*LENNOX sits clothed and passive, facing the footlights.*]

LENNOX. Don't worry about me. Get on with the salvage. Got the passports, dear? I'll put on my shoes, Nurse.

NURSE. No, let me.

[*She puts them on, while MRS. LENNOX collects property.*]

[*GUSTAVE is seen in the corridor.*]

LENNOX. New cure for heart trouble? I feel fine.

GUSTAVE. [*Appearing in the doorway; gently*] Monsieur, Madame—the 'ouse burn, Madame. Plentec time—a leetle journey to the roof, Sare—one flight onlec, Madame, and the iron steps.

LENNOX. Splendid, Gustave!

GUSTAVE. Beeg fire—flames veree 'igh; but soon the pompiers come. Excuse, Madame, I tell the ladce and gentleman next door, and come back. [*He vanishes.*]

MRS. L. This is terrible. Harry!

LENNOX. [*Calmly*] Go and see to the chicks, dear. Nurse and Gustave will give me a hand, eh, Nurse?

NURSE. It's all right, Mrs. Lennox, we can manage perfectly

[MRS. LENNOX, *after a look at him, hurries out in her coat, and with a bag in her hand.*

LENNOX. [*Leaning back with his eyes closed*] Nurse, I thought this was going to be good for me, but I'm afraid it isn't.

NURSE. [*Applying salts*] Gently! There's plenty of time.

LENNOX. [*Faintly*] All the time in the world, and a little over perhaps.

NURSE. [*Applying flask*] Drink some brandy.

LENNOX. [*After drinking*] Ah! That's better! Now, Nurse!
[*She puts her arm round him, and he stands.*

[GUSTAVE *is seen in the corridor. As they move towards the door, he comes in.*

GUSTAVE. *Les pompiers*, the engines come, Sare.

[*They stand listening to the approaching klaxon of a fire-engine.*

LENNOX. Nurse, I think I'd rather bet on the engines and just wait.

NURSE. Very well. Come back to the sofa. I'll wait with you.

GUSTAVE. Sare, we carry you. The flames march so queeck—better we carry you.

LENNOX. [*Sitting*] No, Gustave. Get your other folk up. I shall be all right.

GUSTAVE. [*Lifting his hands in patient protest*] I come back, Sare. [*He goes again, and is seen running down the corridor.*

LENNOX. Now, Nurse, trot along!

NURSE. [*With a smile*] Don't be silly.

LENNOX. The Nurse stood on the burning deck whence all but she had fled. First poem I ever learned; indelibly connected with strawberry jam. Well, I'm all for cremation, and one will avoid the service. [*The swish of water is heard.*] [*Putting his hand to his heart.*] Yes, I've got to take the chance. I don't feel like moving. Nurse, there's a little photograph in the left-hand top drawer there—d'you mind? [*The Nurse gets it.*] [*Looking at it.*] My wife when she was three years old. Nice—um? Now, Nurse, please go! You'll find me here quite comfortable when they've put the fire out. Please!

NURSE. You know I can't leave you.

GUSTAVE. [*Appearing from corridor*] Time to go, Sare.

LENNOX. Gustave, take Nurse away.

NURSE. Mr. Lennox, I think for your wife and children's sake we ought to have a try.

[*A pause. The shadow of his fear passes over LENNOX's face. He masters it.*

LENNOX. All right, Nurse, since you won't go.

NURSE. Lean all your weight on me. [LENNOX rises.

GUSTAVE. [*With suit-case in one hand*] The arm round my neck, Sare—round Mademoiselle's neck—veree comfortable, verree easy. Now, Sare, we march.

[*They move thus towards the door. Just there LENNOX's heart suddenly gives way, and he becomes dead weight. They bend and halt in horror.*

NURSE. [*Looking in his face; in a whisper*] I'm afraid he's——

GUSTAVE. Oh! oh! I get 'elp, we carry 'eem.

NURSE. He's dead, Gustave.

[*On GUSTAVE dropping the suit-case to cross himself and hold up his hand in patient dismay,*

The curtain falls.

SCENE VII

THE ROOF

The same evening: twenty minutes past Midnight.

The empty moonlit roof, shut in by much higher roofs on either side, with a trap door Centre. There is a parapet at the back of the stage, and from over it one sees the roofs of houses and the stars in the sky. Bright moonlight throws shadows, and the flare of flame is seen at times. The engines are playing on the fire below, with an intermittent hissing.

[*The trap door is raised and the capped head of MR. BEETON is seen emerging. He looks round him and calls down.*

MR. B. It's all right—quite flat. No smoke. Up you come!
[*He puts down a bag and stands reaching down his hand, takes his wife's dressing-case, deposits it, and reaches his hand down again.*]

MRS. B.'s VOICE. No, Tom, you're only clawing me; I can manage. Is anybody up there?

MR. B. Not a cat. [MRS. BEETON's head and body, to the waist, emerge.] Give us both hands. Now then! [MRS. BEETON arrives.]

MRS. B. Have you looked over?

MR. B. [*At the parapet*] M'm! It's a long way down! No flames yet this side. They'll rig something up. [*Looking at the high side-walls.*] Why they built a little house in between two big ones like this I don't know. Perverse devils the French! [*The head of DIANA has emerged from the trap.*] Hallo! So you've got here all right, young woman. Where's your sister?

DIANA. [*Looking down the trap*] Come on, Bryn.

BRYN. [*Running to the parapet*] Oo! It's beastly high! Shall we have to go down a rope? [*Turning to MRS. BEETON.*] Can you climb down ropes?

MRS. B. I could when I was your age. But they'll put us into chutes or something—won't they, Tom? Do you see any firemen?

MR. B. Not yet! This is the back of the house. Goodness knows if these French firemen are any good. What do they call 'em? Pomp——

DIANA. Pompiers.

MR. B. Ah! Pompeers.

DIANA. Look, Bryn! [*Pointing to the trap; softly.*] The Honeyspooners!

[*She and BRYN go to the far corner of the parapet. The YOUNG WOMAN, her head swathed in a scarf, emerges, followed by the YOUNG MAN. They both move over to the parapet.*]

YOUNG WOMAN. [*Shuddering*] I do hate heights, Tony.

MR. B. [*Approaching the YOUNG MAN*] Let me introduce my wife. [*The YOUNG PEOPLE bow, and the YOUNG WOMAN shrinks a little away, looking over the parapet.*] Shouldn't be

surprised if it was all exaggerated. They bundled us up in such a hurry. [*To the YOUNG MAN*] Shall we go down and see?

MRS. B. You'll do nothing of the kind, Tom.

YOUNG WOMAN. [*Aside*] Tony, don't leave me!

YOUNG MAN. All right, darling.

MR. B. They're always having fires in Paris. It's an inflammable place.

BRYN. [*Suddenly*] Di, we *must* go down and see about Mum and Dad.

MRS. B. No, my dears, you'll just stay here.

BRYN. But suppose something's happened to them. Oh! here's somebody coming! [*They go towards the trap.*] [*FROBA emerges, violin under one arm and a bag in the other hand.*] Did you see my father and mother?

DIANA. Yes, did you?

FROBA. No one passed up to my floor. I judge dey're still below.

MR. B. Got your fiddle, I see, Sir.

FROBA. I sure have. Say, is dere no fire escape up here?

MR. B. Not a sign of one.

FROBA. Noting between our souls and de stars.

BRYN. [*Suddenly*] Have you been in a fire before?

FROBA. Sure!

BRYN. Oh! do tell us.

MRS. B. Don't do anything of the sort.

[*FROBA passes on, to the parapet, and looks over.*]

MR. B. [*Gazing at the side walls*] Looks to me as if we werc in a trap up here.

MRS. B. Don't talk like that, Tom—the children!

BRYN. Oh! It's awful!

YOUNG MAN. I'll go down and see.

[*The YOUNG WOMAN puts out her hand as if to keep him.*]

DIANA. Oh! would you?

BRYN. [*Who is at the trap*] Oh! Di! There's Mum! She's fainting. Nurse and Gustave have got her all stretched out. They can't get her up! And where's Dad?

YOUNG MAN. Nell?

YOUNG WOMAN. Yes, go! *[He slips down the trap. They all gather round the trap.]*

MR. B. *[Directing into the aperture]* That's right! Get her under the arms! Good! Don't let her slip! Capital! She's coming!

MRS. B. Don't fuss, Tom!

[The YOUNG MAN is slowly emerging with MRS. LENNOX clasped to him. DIANA and BRYN tug under his arms, and he lands his burden and stands breathless, GUSTAVE following up, holding MRS. LENNOX's feet.]

DIANA and BRYN. *[Hanging over their motionless MOTHER]* Mum! Mum!

MRS. B. *[At her dressing-case]* Here! Wait! I've got some sal volatile.

MR. B. Bend her head down! Tickle her feet! Pinch her!

[The NURSE emerges from the trap, GUSTAVE assisting her.]

GUSTAVE. A leetle brandy—I get it—'ave a leetle in my room—veree old.

NURSE. No, no, Gustave! Nothing better than sal volatile.

[She takes it from MRS. BEETON and administers it. GUSTAVE stands hovering over the scene.]

DIANA. Where's Dad, Nurse?

NURSE. H'ssh! Don't—your mother——

BRYN. But why did she faint? Mum never faints.

DIANA. *[Beginning to realize]* Nurse! Dad?

NURSE. 'Ssh! Look, she's coming to. Don't think of yourselves. Think of her!

[MRS. LENNOX is regaining consciousness. The CHILDREN gaze at her face. The others have withdrawn a little, except the NURSE, who holds her head.]

BRYN. *[Timidly]* We're here, Mum.

MRS. L. Where am I? Where——?

DIANA. On the roof, Mum. We're quite safe—only where's——? *[Checks herself.]*

BRYN. Is Dad coming?

[MRS. LENNOX looks at one CHILD and the other, and shakes her head, staring before her. DIANA throws herself down into her lap, with a choked "Oh! Mum!"]

BRYN. [Frozen] Why?

MRS. L. [Very quietly over DIANA's head] Dad is dead.

BRYN. Oh-h-h! [Her face breaks up, and then she doesn't cry.]

MRS. B. [With a rapid movement circling her with an arm] Brave child! Brave child! There, there! That's right! Don't cry!

DIANA. [Wrenching free, on her knees] Mum, how?

NURSE. His heart, dear.

GUSTAVE. Courage, Madame.

MRS. L. Help me up.

GUSTAVE. [Helping her] A so brave ladce.

[The NURSE and CHILDREN gather round her. BRICE emerges from the trap and shrinks apart.]

GUSTAVE. [Going up to the BEETONS, Centre] You 'ave everything you weesh, Madame? [To BEETON] De roof verree nice, verree flat, Sarc.

MR. B. How are we going to get off the damned thing. We're not birds.

GUSTAVE. No, Sarc [Glancing at MRS. BEETON], but angels.

MRS. B. What's that?

GUSTAVE. Excuse, Madame! De pompriers soon come, den we fly. I go now find de oder gentlemen. [To the YOUNG COUPLE] I fetch you something, Madame?

YOUNG WOMAN. No, no, thanks! I'm all right! You're not going down again?

GUSTAVE. Oh! Yes, Madame; my dutce, I in charge.

[Young FANNING appears, stands dazedly, then turns to the parapet. GUSTAVE goes down.]

YOUNG MAN. Young Fanning! Keep your face turned, Nell. [She turns, shrouded in her scarf; and he moves towards FANNING.]

YOUNG MAN. Hallo, Fanning!

FANNING. Oh! Hallo! I say, this is seeing "life," what!

YOUNG MAN. [*Low*] Seeing death. [*Pointing to the CHILDREN and their MOTHER*] Their father's dead—heart failure.

FANNING. I say!

[*BAKER's head emerges and he comes up the trap, followed by MOULTENEY.*

BAKER. Where's the old waiter, Major?

[*BRICE turns sharply round.*

MOULTENEY. By George, isn't he here? The flames are pretty well up to the second floor.

NURSE. [*Who has approached*] He must have gone back to Mr. Lennox.

MOULTENEY. What! Somebody else down there still?

NURSE. Dead—his heart failed. That poor lady!

[*MRS. LENNOX comes rushing up to them.*

MRS. L. Nurse! Sir! I must—I can't let him stay down there.

BAKER. Steady, Ma'am! Of course not! We'll get him. Here, four of us! Who? [*All cluster round.*] Reggie, you! I. [*To the YOUNG MAN*] You!

YOUNG MAN. Rather! [*Turning back to the YOUNG WOMAN.*] I must, Nell. I must.

[*BAKER and the MAJOR are restraining MRS. LENNOX.*

YOUNG WOMAN. Of course! [*She suddenly frees her face.*

[*The YOUNG MAN runs back to the trap and goes down.*

BAKER. Down you go, Reggie! [*FANNING descends.*] Major! Right!

MR. B. [*Pushing forward*] Look here! I——

MOULTENEY. No, Sir. The younger men.

MR. B. What! What are you, if it comes to that?

BRICE. [*Pushing suddenly between them*] Get out of the way!

[*He descends.*

BAKER. [*Barring the way to the elder men*] Now, Major, you and our friend look after the ladies. We'll get him. Right!

[*He descends.*

MR. B. Look here! I don't get any show. What!

MRS. B. [*Taking his arm*] Tom, don't be foolish!

MR. B. Damn!

[MRS. LENNOX turns up, covering her face with her hands. A hush has fallen. FROBA has gone back to the parapet. The NURSE stands beside MRS. LENNOX and DIANA is close to them. MR. and MRS. BEETON and the MAJOR, not far from them, are talking in low tones. The YOUNG WOMAN stands by herself forward on the Right close to the trap.]

FROBA. [*Coming up to her from the parapet*] Now's de time to tink of our sins, Madam.

YOUNG WOMAN. [*Startled*] I beg your pardon.

FROBA. My nerve's kind of going. Look! [*He points.*] Say! Dere's beauty in flames! But when dey come near. [*Shudders. She covers her eyes.*] You been in a fire, too, I guess.

YOUNG WOMAN. Yes.

FROBA. It sure rips the skin off your soul.

YOUNG WOMAN. It's horrible—so cruel.

FROBA. Aye! What can you put against it? Say, d'you tink dat poor lady'd mind if I play my fiddle.

YOUNG WOMAN. [*Impatient*] No, play if you want to. Play! [*As he recoils towards his violin, to herself.*] Tony! [BRYN steals up to her and peers into the trap.]

BRYN. Oh! Isn't it hot? D'you think it's dangerous now?

YOUNG WOMAN. Yes.

BRYN. Dad wouldn't like them to risk their lives for him, now he's dead. [*She covers her face with her arm, and the YOUNG WOMAN puts an arm round her. In a choked voice*] He was such a darling. [*Freeing her face and shaking her head.*] He'd much rather be left there. I know he would.

YOUNG WOMAN. But your mother, dear.

[FROBA begins to play his muted violin.]

BRYN. Oh! Dad! [*The YOUNG WOMAN strokes the top of her head. Brokenly*] Nasty stuffy coffin! [*Trying to break away.*] I want to go down.

YOUNG WOMAN. No, no, no! You might easily make one of them lose his life.

BRYN. Isn't it awful! We were having such a gorgeous time. And so were you, I expect.

MR. B. [*Voice suddenly raised*] These confounded old French houses—all wood, and no fire extinguishers. They ought to be prosecuted. Some paraffin left about, I'll bet.

BRYN. Suppose it all fell in! And they were killed!

YOUNG WOMAN. Don't!

BRYN. [*With a gesture towards FROBA*] I wish he wouldn't, I'm going to cry.

YOUNG WOMAN. Cry, dear! You'll feel better.

BRYN. [*Suddenly slipping down and kneeling at the trap*] Listen!

[*BAKER's voice is heard.*]

BAKER. Right!

BRYN. [*Excitedly*] They're coming! [*Recoiling.*] Oh! I don't want to see!

YOUNG WOMAN. [*Drawing her away*] No! There, there! Tuck your head into me.

[*She stands looking over the child's buried face.*]

BRYN. [*In a smothered voice*] I feel—I feel all grown-up!

[*DIANA and all, save MRS. LENNOX and the NURSE, are gathered round the trap. BAKER emerges. He looks up at MRS. LENNOX, who covers her face and turns away.*]

MOULTENEY. Well?

BAKER. Too late. That floor's blazing.

[*The YOUNG MAN emerges; then FANNING and BRICE, of whom the last steals away again to the parapet.*]

MOULTENEY. [*To FANNING*] Anything wrong, old chap?

FANNING. Caught my sleeve. It's nothing, Major.

BRICE. Stop that damn noise.

FROBA. Say, Mister—is de fire gaining?

BRICE. Oh! Go to hell!

FROBA. No need to go, I guess. We got it right here.

[*A dead silence.*]

MR. B. [*Coming up*] Pretty bad down there, what! Where

are those damned pompeers? Are they goin' to let us roast up here? Phew! It's coming up now. [*He recoils from the heat emerging.*] [*They all turn to the parapet.*]

MOULTENEY. [*Calling to BRICE*] Any of them there?

BRICE. Not a blasted sign!

BAKER. Come and shout!

[*He and FANNING join BRICE, and all of them begin shouting: "Ladders, ladders, échelles, ladders!" All are at the parapet now except MRS. LENNOX, and the YOUNG MAN and WOMAN, who have been standing close together silent.*]

YOUNG WOMAN. [*As the shouting stops*] Tony, if we get away, I'm coming—for good. [*"Ladders."*]

YOUNG MAN. You are, Nell? You are? The fire was worth it then.

DIANA. [*From the parapet*] Look! There they are! Look! [*"Ladders. We want ladders!" The shouting goes up once more, and then stops altogether.*]

MR. B. [*Shouting down over the parapet*] No, put 'em there! The French are hopeless.

FANNING. [*Turning and suddenly coming on the couple, who are approaching the parapet*] Why! Why, it's Mrs. Charles!

YOUNG WOMAN. It was Mrs. Charles, Reggie.

YOUNG MAN. Yes, Fanning. This lady is going to be my wife in future.

FANNING. Oh! Quite! I see. Yes! Of course! Yes! [*Still absorbed by the awkwardness of the meeting.*] Do you think we shall get down in time? I say! Look there! [*Smoke is rising from the trap.*] Hadn't we better shut that? It makes a draught, you know.

[*He and the YOUNG MAN close the trap door.*]

BAKER. [*At the parapet*] Here come the chutes! Up—up—up—up! [*FANNING, running to the parapet, joins in the shout.*]

MOULTENEY. [*Taking charge*] Now, please, all—steady! In order—ready. [*To BRYN*] You, child, [*To DIANA*] and you. Then you, Mrs. Lennox, and you, Mrs. Beeton. Please line up here, and don't waste time!

[Two POMPIERS, one after the other, appear over the parapet.

MOULTENEY. Now, child, into the chute.

BRYN. No! Di and Mum!

MOULTENEY. Do as you're told. Baker, you and Brice get over and help with the chutes.

[BAKER and BRICE climb over to work with the POMPIERS.

MRS. B. [While BRYN is being handed down, followed by DIANA and MRS. LENNOX] I'm not going without you, Tom.

MR. B. Stuff! Don't be silly!

MRS. B. Couldn't they put us in together?

MOULTENEY. [To MRS. BEETON] Come along, Mrs. Beeton.

MRS. B. No, I prefer to wait with my husband.

MOULTENEY. Come, you're only keeping us. [As she holds back, looking round.] Very well. Nurse! Down you go. [The NURSE goes over and down.] [To MRS. BEETON clinging to BEETON.] Now, Mrs. Beeton. [BAKER and he seize her and put her over the edge.

MRS. B. [As she goes over] Tom, you're to come next. D'you hear me! No! Don't contradict! [With an agonized] Tom!

[She disappears.

BAKER. [To BEETON] Now, Sir. Race her down!

MR. B. There's another lady! What!

YOUNG WOMAN. [From where she has been standing clinging to the YOUNG MAN and half hidden] Please go, I'm all right.

YOUNG MAN. Nell!

YOUNG WOMAN. No.

[Clings to him.

MR. B. Ladies first! Here, I say——!

MOULTENEY. Over you get, Sir. Shove him over! [FANNING, BRICE and BAKER shove MR. BEETON over, protesting.

MR. B. Well, I'm dashed! It's most irregular——

[Disappears.

MOULTENEY. [At the other chute] Ready here! [To the YOUNG MAN] Bring her, please.

[The YOUNG MAN lifts the YOUNG WOMAN and carries her to the chute. She turns her head to him, and her face is seen pale, straining to his; then she too vanishes over the edge.

BAKER. [*Above the parapet*] Now you, Sir, with the hair. Got your fiddle! Right!

FROBA. What about you oder guys?

BAKER. Get on! [FROBA goes over into the other chute.

YOUNG MAN. [*Leaning over*] 'I thank God! She's down.

BAKER. [*His head and thrown-up hands appearing above parapet*] By Gad! that chute's gone! Only one in action now, Major. Who's next? Good Lord! This has caught fire. We must just wait.

[*He and BRICE climb back, and the five MEN wait, clustered at the parapet.*

MOULTENEY. How did this damned fire start? [BRICE makes as if to speak and checks himself.] Do you know?

BRICE. [*Sullenly*] How should I know?

MOULTENEY. Well, do you—that's the point?

BRICE. [*Defiant*] Yes. It was a joke on the old waiter.

MOULTENEY. Good God! You lit it!

BRICE. The old chap checked me. I saw a bottle of paraffin on the table in his den and his hat at the other end, and I laid a train to the hat and set a match to it. The flames must have run back to the bottle and burst it. It was just a joke. [*He looks at their blank faces with a sort of appeal.*] Don't give me away to the French.

FANNING. Of course, we shan't give you away.

BAKER. [*Suddenly*] Look out, Major! They've got that chute right again.

MOULTENEY. Reggie! You next.

FANNING. No, Major! Elders.

MOULTENEY. [*Quietly*] On the contrary, my boy—this isn't a war. [*The head of one of the POMPIERS appears.*

FANNING. I say, Mr. Baker—make him!

MOULTENEY. [*To the YOUNG MAN*] Come on then, Sir! You next. [*As the YOUNG MAN holds back.*

BAKER. Lovers first! You owe it to the lady. Come on! Over you go. [*The YOUNG MAN goes over.*] Right! Now, Major, don't let's have any fuss—your turn.

MOULTENEY. Let's send the old waiter down. Gustave! Where is he?

BAKER. [*Looking round*] Good God! Hasn't he come up again?

BRICE. What!

BAKER. Here! Get that trap open.

[*He and BRICE spring to the trap and wrench it off.*]

BAKER. By God! He must be suffocated—it's hot as hell! Gustave!

FANNING. [*Agonized*] Gustave!

BAKER. What's to be done, Major? Can't let the poor old boy——

MOULTENEY. Steady! To go down is certain death! Call him! [*They call: "Gustave!"*]

BAKER. He must be lying there!

FANNING. Major, it's up to us. We must get him. Think if he's lying there; such a frightfully decent old chap! I'll go!

MOULTENEY. Stop him, Baker! [*BAKER seizes him.*]

FANNING. Let go, Mr. Baker. Give me a chance.

[*BAKER holds on.*]

BRICE. I'm going. [*Pushing BAKER aside.*] To hell with you! This is my shoot. [*He disappears headlong down the trap.*]

BAKER. That's put the lid on. What now? [*The POMPIERS appear on the parapet.*] Here are these fellows again!

A POMPIER. Venez, Messieurs, venez. Vite!

MOULTENEY. Now, Reggie! Here, take him—he isn't safe!

FANNING. I call it rotten—you won't let me play the game.

MOULTENEY. You have, my son.

FANNING. Let go! Major, make them. It's like deserting while those two are still down there. Let me go down to them.

MOULTENEY. No, Reggie—first duty of a soldier—obey orders. Now!

FANNING. [*After a look*] All right, Major.

[*He goes of his own accord.*]

BAKER. That boy's made good! What about it, Major?

MOULTENEY. One or other of us. No good both staying. You go.

BAKER. [*Spinning a coin and calling*] Heads! Tails! Your shot. [*The MAJOR climbs over and goes down the chute.*]

POMPIERS. [*To BAKER*] Venez, Monsieur, venez!

BAKER. [*Pointing wildly*] Still below there! [*He looks down the trap, shading his eyes.*] Brice! Brice!

[*The POMPIERS approach and seize him.*]

BAKER. Get out! Damn it! Can't leave my friend. [*He breaks from them and calls down the trap.*] Brice!

POMPIER. Venez, Monsieur—rien à faire—vous nous perdrez tous!

[*A drift of smoke comes up. They seize BAKER, run him up to the parapet and force him over.*]

[*A cheer rises from below. During this the smoke issuing from the trap has cleared for a moment, and BRICE is seen on the steps leading to the trap painfully thrusting GUSTAVE up so that his head and half his body are visible lying in the mouth of the trap.*]

BRICE. [*Gasping*] There you are, old sport—blast you! That's quits. God! I'm all in.

[*He reels and slips back down the steps.*]

[*A POMPIER has turned from the parapet. He sees GUSTAVE.*]

POMPIER. Ah! le voilà. Voyez, Jacques!

[*They rush to GUSTAVE, lift him and carry him to the parapet.*]

1ST POMPIER. Il est foutu.

2ND POMPIER. [*Feeling his heart and lips*] Non, non, non! Il vit, il vit.

GUSTAVE. [*Recovering consciousness and looking round*] Un Monsieur—Un Monsieur Anglais! [*Pointing to the trap.*] Là-bas—Vite! [*He tries to escape from them and go back. Wildly*] 'E save me. [*He collapses.*]

POMPIERS. Voyons—voyons!

[*They lift him over the parapet. A cheer rises from below and another as GUSTAVE is lowered down. The POMPIERS reappear and go towards the trap.*]

1ST POMPIER. [*At the top, calling*] Monsieur! Hé! Là-bas!

2ND POMPIER. Faut descendre! [*He tries to go down the steps but is driven back by a blast of smoke and heat. Reappearing, gasping.*] C'est impossible! Doit être mort!

[*The 1ST POMPIER tries, but is also driven back.*

2ND POMPIER. Fini! [*He sees the cat at the end of the parapet.*] Ah! V'la le chat! Prenez le! Pincez le bougre!

[*The 1ST POMPIER seizes the cat.*

2ND POMPIER. [*At the parapet*] Vite Jacques, vite!

[*They disappear over the parapet.*

[*A cry of "Oh! Là" A second shrill cheer. A glare and a flurry of water. Then in the smoke BRICE is seen emerging from the trap. He sways, suffocated, reels forward and subsides against the parapet. A spurt of flame shoots forth from the trap. He raises himself, looks over and round him and calls wildly. Smoke drifts over the parapet. With a groan and a despairing gesture he climbs on to the parapet.*

BRICE. Christ! I'm done for! Up—up—up!

[*And falls down into the drifting smoke.*

The curtain falls.